

A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm

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A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm

Edited by

Mike Humphreys



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Cover illustration: Small Sekreton of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, south tympanum, west side.
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Preface

In this brief Preface, I would first like to sketch what this *Companion* aims to be, and what it does not. In the first instance, it is “A” not “The” *Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm*. By this I mean more than the usual modesty topos common to academic work. The subject is truly vast, as is the literature surrounding it. Therefore, to produce something useful to both newcomers and specialists the decision was taken to focus on what were deemed the essential topics, and to cover those in depth. One result of this is that there are fewer, but longer and more detailed, chapters than might have otherwise been the case. Another was to be highly focused on *Byzantine* iconoclasm, that is the controversy over religious figural imagery in Byzantium during the 8th and 9th centuries. Inevitably, many important topics could (and perhaps should) receive much greater attention than they do here. It is hoped, however, that this detailed focus better serves this volume’s twin goals: to act as an introduction to a complex and contested subject, and as a spur for further research by newcomer and specialist alike.

Secondly, I would like to add a quick note about names, terms, and capitalization. Transliterating Greek names and terms into the Latin alphabet is a notoriously tricky problem with several valid solutions. Overall, as editor I allowed each contributor to follow their own style so long as it was clear who or what was being referred to. So, for instance, the famous iconophile Theodore can be called “Theodore the Stoudite” or “Theodore Studites”, and the iconophile writer and patriarch can be called Nikephoros or Nicephorus. A greater attempt at consistency has been tried for when it comes to capitalization. On the whole, lower case is preferred for most terms, for example “iconoclast” or “iconoclasm”. However, for the sake of clarity, when a period of time is being referred to capitals are employed. For instance, the period running from the reintroduction of some form of prohibition on icon veneration in 815 to the restoration of icons in 843 is referred to as “Second Iconoclasm”. This is solely meant as an aid to the reader. It is not meant to minimize the importance of “iconoclasts” or the level of destruction that occurred. Nor is it intended to imply the controversy was so important that it should be used to frame time. Finally, “orthodoxy” is used to refer to the idea of correct belief, while “Orthodoxy” refers to the branch of Christianity that is commonly described as such, though given the time period in question and the topic it is often hard to decide which is more appropriate.

Finally, but most importantly, I would like to pay several acknowledgements. This is a big book, and it would not have been possible without the

labour of many. First, as editor I could not have desired a more diligent and thoughtful cohort of contributors, and I give them my personal thanks. The series editor Christopher Bellitto has had the wisdom and patience of a saint, offering much appreciated advice and support throughout the very long process. The team at Brill headed by Ivo Romein have been excellent. The detailed and highly encouraging work by the peer reviewers made this *Companion* a distinctly better volume. Our copy editor Angela Jianu had the unenviable task of bringing greater order to this vast, international, multidisciplinary project, and I thank her for her efforts. Of course, any errors that remain are ours alone. Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my wife Beth. Despite the final year and a bit of this book coinciding with both a global pandemic and the birth of Lily, our first child, you have kept me sane and able to continue working towards completion. For that and for so much more you have my eternal thanks.

Mike Humphreys

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Abbreviations

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i>
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CCCM	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis</i>
CCSG	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca</i>
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i>
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
DOC	<i>Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
DOSeals	<i>Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks</i>
EHR	<i>The English Historical Review</i>
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i>
Mansi	<i>Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio</i> , ed. J. D. Mansi (Florence: 1757–98)
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
PBE	<i>Prosopography of the Byzantine Empire, 641–886</i> , ed. John Martindale (London: 2000)
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. Jacques Paul Migne
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. Jacques Paul Migne
PmbZ	Ralph-Johannes Lilie et al., <i>Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Erste Abteilung (641–867)</i> , 6 vols (Berlin: 1999–2002)
REB	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
SSCIS	<i>Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo</i>
TM	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>

Notes on Contributors

Benjamin Anderson

is Associate Professor of the History of Art and Classics at Cornell University, and author of *Cosmos and Community in Early Medieval Art* (Yale University Press, 2017). His research focuses on late antique and Byzantine art and architecture, the urban history of Constantinople, and the history of archaeology.

Marie-France Auzépy

is Professor emeritus at University Paris VIII. Her main publications are *La Vie d'Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacre* (Variorum, 1997), *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclasme byzantin* (Ashgate, 1999), *L'iconoclasme* (PUF, 2006), and *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris, 2007). She focuses on the so-called "Dark Ages" from a political and religious point of view, and is also interested in the reception of Byzantium in Europe after 1453. Hair, to which she devoted a collective book, is another point of interest.

Sabine Feist

is Professor and Director of the Department of Christian Archaeology at the University of Bonn. Her main publications are *Die byzantinische Sakralarchitektur der Dunklen Jahrhunderte* (Reichert Verlag, 2019), and *Transforming Sacred Spaces: New Approaches to Byzantine Ecclesiastical Architecture from the Transitional Period* (Reichert Verlag, 2020). She focuses on late antique and Byzantine architecture, the formative role of the Christian veneration of saints in late antique and early medieval societies, and the history and development of Christian Archaeology as an academic discipline.

Mike Humphreys

is a researcher at the University of Cambridge. His main publications are: *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850* (Oxford University Press, 2015), and *The Laws of the Isaurian Era: The Ecloga and its Appendices* (Liverpool University Press, 2017). He focuses on Byzantium during the period c.600–900, especially on the topics of law and iconoclasm.

Robin M. Jensen

is the Patrick O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame (USA). Her main publications are: *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy* (Harvard University Press, 2017), *Living Water: Images, Symbols, and Settings of Early Christian Baptism* (Brill, 2011), *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early*

Christianity (Fortress, 2005), and *Understanding Early Christian Art* (Routledge, 2000). She focuses on the history of early Christian material culture, theology, and ritual spaces.

Dirk Krausmüller

was a researcher at the Institute of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies of Vienna University. His main publication is “Contextualizing Constantine v’s radical religious policies: the debate about the intercession of the saints and the ‘sleep of the soul’ in the Chalcedonian and Nestorian churches”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39 (2015), 25–49. He focuses on late antique and Byzantine theology, hagiography, and monasticism.

Andrew Louth

is Professor Emeritus at the University of Durham. His main publications are: *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Greek East and Latin West: the Church AD 681–1071* (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2007). His research currently focuses on the history of the interpretation of the Six Days of Creation (the *Hexaemeron*) in, principally, the Christian tradition.

Thomas F. X. Noble

is the Andrew V. Tackes Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame. His latest monograph is *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia, 2009). He continues to work on papal history and the history of the city of Rome.

Ken Parry

is Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Department of History and Archaeology, Macquarie University, Sydney. He researches and publishes in the fields of late antiquity, Byzantine Studies, and Eastern Christianity. He is the author of *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (1996) and founding editor of the Brill series Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity. He has edited *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* (1999), *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity* (2007), and *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics* (2015). He recently contributed to *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (2017) and *Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy* (2020).

Richard Price

is Professor Emeritus at Heythrop College, University of London, and Honorary Research Fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London. His recent publications are: *The Acts of the Second Council of Ephesus (787)* (2018), *The Council of Ephesus of 431: Documents and Proceedings*, with Thomas Graumann (2020), and *The Canons of the Quinisext Council (691/2)* (2020), all published by Liverpool University Press. His main field of research is late antique and early Byzantine Christianity, and especially church councils.

Christian C. Sahner

is an Associate Professor of Islamic history at the University of Oxford and a fellow of St Cross College. His publications include *Christian Martyrs under Islam* (Princeton, 2018) and *Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age* (California, 2020, co-editor). He focuses on the transition from late antiquity to the Islamic Middle Ages; relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians and Zoroastrians; and the interconnected histories of Syria, Iran, and the Islamic West.

Jesse W. Torgerson

is Assistant Professor of Letters at Wesleyan University. He has recently published *The Chronographia of George the Synkellos and Theophanes: The Ends of Time in Ninth-Century Constantinople* (Brill, 2022). His research focuses on the material, socio-political, and literary contexts of Byzantine accounts of the past, considering, in particular, manuscripts, narrative strategies, generic hybridity, and periodization.

Introduction

Contexts, Controversies, and Developing Perspectives

Mike Humphreys

1 **Byzantine Iconoclasm: Controversies Medieval and Modern**

To the conclave that raged against the venerable icons:
Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!

To them who consider the declarations of Divine Scripture against
the idols as referring to the venerable icons of Christ our God and
His saints:
Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!

To them who knowingly have communion with those who insult
and dishonour the venerable icons:
Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!

To them who say that another besides Christ our God delivered us
from the deception of idols:
Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!

To them who dare say that the Catholic Church at one time had
accepted idols, and thus they overthrow the entire mystery, and
blaspheme the Faith of Christians:
Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!

If anyone does not worship our Lord Jesus Christ depicted in the
icons according to His humanity, let him be:
Anathema! Anathema! Anathema!¹

For more than a millennium these ritual damnations of those who argue
against the adoration of icons in Christian worship have been proclaimed

¹ *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, ed. Jean Gouillard, "Le synodikon de l'orthodoxie: Édition et commentaire," *TM* 2 (1967), 1–316.

by the Orthodox Church on the first Sunday of Lent, when the “Feast of Orthodoxy” is celebrated. They are only one part of a document called *The Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, whose reading is the centrepiece of the feast. While a fluid text added to over the centuries, its original core and principal focus is the proclamation of the orthodoxy of icons, the celebration of their defenders—the iconophiles or iconodules, literally the “image-lovers” or “image-servants/slaves”—and the castigation of their opponents. It was created in the aftermath of the “Triumph of Orthodoxy” in 843, when icons and icon-veneration were for the final time restored to the Byzantine Church. In the following pages considerable doubt is cast on the scale and saliency of iconoclasm (literally “the destruction of icons”) in Byzantium at the time when the dispute was traditionally thought to be raging in the 8th and early 9th centuries. Indeed, it is a repeated refrain that Byzantine society was not completely engrossed in the controversy, and that rather than see Byzantium through the prism of iconoclasm one can only fully understand the dispute by setting it in context. Yet these anathemas remind us that iconoclasm had a huge impact on both Byzantium and Orthodox Christianity, which in the case of the later endures to this day.

Whatever happened “in reality”, in the Byzantine and Orthodox historical memory the struggle over images became the defining feature of the age. Furthermore, by placing so much emphasis on iconoclasm it became almost the arch-heresy. Therefore, a large part of what it meant and means to be Orthodox is to be anti-iconoclast and pro-icon. As we shall see, this development is one of the many ironies of Byzantine iconoclasm. For, to a large extent, it was because a heated debate over icons emerged in Byzantium that icon veneration was transformed from a permissible but generally unremarked, relatively recent, and not universal practice, into something that the Byzantine Church declared an ancient, fundamental, and necessary rite. Thanks to the iconophile victory, icons became a quintessential aspect of Byzantine and Orthodox life. If for no other reason, iconoclasm changed Byzantium and the Orthodox world forever.

This enduring historical significance is one reason why the topic of Byzantine iconoclasm has attracted generations of scholars. Another is that the iconoclast controversy was the first time in Christian history when art was a central topic of importance. Underneath the rampant name-calling and mud-throwing, we can find in our sources a multifaceted and often sophisticated argument drawing on both ancient philosophy and Christian theology. Questions were debated as fundamental as the very nature of representation, the possibilities of depicting the divine, the definition of idolatry, the correct ways to worship God, how to live a Christian life, how to interpret the Bible and the role of the

Old Testament for Christians, amid much else. Few other topics in Byzantine, late antique, or medieval history offer as much shared ground for interest to art historians, theologians, and historians of all hues than Byzantine iconoclasm.

Moreover, the period itself is fascinating and critical. For all the changes that had occurred in the previous centuries, around 600 A.D. the Eastern Mediterranean and its surrounding regions looked much as they had done for generations, with the Eastern Roman Empire still recognisably the empire formed between the reigns of Constantine I (306–37) and Justinian I (527–65). This late antique world was shattered and recast over the subsequent three centuries, morphing into the medieval. Byzantium was at the centre of this global storm even if it was usually not the primary driver of events, and anyone hoping to understand the period must study it. And to understand Byzantium in this era one must examine iconoclasm, firstly because it was undeniably an important feature of the time, and secondly because we know far more about the topic than about any other thanks to the fact that the majority of our sources were composed by committed iconophiles.

For these reasons and others scholarship on Byzantine iconoclasm, accumulated over more than a century of intense work often by some of the most influential scholars in their fields, is truly vast. Essentially every aspect and source has generated a complicated and formidable literature. Indeed, several scholars have commented on the sheer volume of work done on the subject. Already in 1973 Peter Brown declared that “the Iconoclast controversy is in the grip of a crisis of over-explanation,” before proceeding to add his own interpretation.² More forthrightly, Averil Cameron wrote in 1992: “One has to be brave to return to the subject of Byzantine Iconoclasm, a subject which, we may feel, has been done to death.”³ Since then even more ink has been spilled. This *Companion* does not pretend to give a comprehensive account of the literature, or indeed all the facets of Byzantine iconoclasm. Even if it were twice the length and had been written over thrice the time it could not hope to do so. Rather it hopes to act as a critical introduction to the current state of the field, and on occasion to push the field in new directions.

Inevitably this means that it is in part reacting to recent scholarship and its priorities.⁴ As even a casual glance at the footnotes will reveal, that means

2 Peter Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” *EHR* 88 (1973), 1–34, 3.

3 Averil Cameron, “The Language of Images: The Rise of Icons and Christian Representation,” in David Wood (ed.), *The Church and the Arts*, (Studies in Church History) 28 (Oxford: 1992), 1–42, 1.

4 For those interested in the much wider context of religious art in the late antique period, see the fruits of the *Empires of Faith* project directed by Jaś Elsner, including idem (ed.), *Empires*

above all the work of Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, especially their magisterial *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850: A History*, published in 2011.⁵ Not only is this a monumental piece of scholarship in itself, it represents something of a culmination of a wave of revisionist scholarship that has challenged virtually every facet of our understanding of Byzantine iconoclasm. Every contributor to this *Companion*, to greater or lesser extents, has been influenced by this wave in general and by this book in particular. Overall, the present volume, or more precisely its individual components, pushes back against some of Brubaker and Haldon's arguments, especially those based on the brilliant but often speculative work of Paul Speck. However, it remains indispensable reading for anyone interested in Byzantine iconoclasm or Byzantium in the period. To understand both Brubaker and Haldon and the present *Companion*, it is necessary to briefly survey the historiography.

Among the numerous learned works produced between the late 19th century and the immediate post-World War II era—the period that witnessed the emergence of modern Byzantine Studies—there was considerable disagreement over aspects of iconoclasm or, as it was usually called, “the iconoclastic controversy”. From the beginning there have been debates over the sources, universally recognized as even more problematic than is normal for the period due to their overall paucity and frequent polemic stemming from the fact that they are mostly the product of committed iconophiles. These debates naturally fed into the sort of arguments common to all academic studies, ranging from particularities such as the dating of an event to larger issues of interpretation. Two interrelated questions dominated, namely what caused Byzantine iconoclasm and what was its precise significance. Was it essentially a political struggle, with theological wrangling merely a secondary issue or there simply to justify the secular motives of emperors? Or was the controversy truly a religious one, with real debates over how to depict and worship God that were inevitably enmeshed within complex Christological problems? Was it a contest between Church and State, or within the Church? Were the original iconoclast instigators certain bishops, or Leo III? Whoever they were, were they

of Faith in Late Antiquity: Histories of Art from India to Ireland (Cambridge: 2020), and Jas Elsner and Rachel Woods (eds.), *Imagining the Divine: Art in Religions of Late Antiquity across Eurasia* (London: 2021).

5 Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History* (Cambridge: 2011). This built on their overview of the sources in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period (ca. 680–850): The Sources* (Aldershot: 2001), as well as on decades of previous research by both. Brubaker then produced a short, and in places even more radical, overview in Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Bristol: 2012).

spurred to action primarily through processes internal to Byzantium, whether that be the rise of the icon as an object of cult veneration or long theological debates over the nature of Christ and the interpretation of scripture? Or were outside forces, notably Islam, more responsible? For some, iconoclasm was an aberration and the victory of the iconophiles was the triumph of Hellenistic Christianity as opposed to the Semitic and Oriental influences within both Byzantium and the Church. Others argued that both iconoclasts and iconophiles had solid grounding in established Christian thought. Yet others sought the causes of iconoclasm within the changing structures of Byzantine society, opposing Constantinople to the countryside, Greece to Anatolia, the military and urban mob to the monks and learned elites.⁶

What was not in much doubt was the overarching narrative of what actually happened. This held that sometime in the 720s a campaign of words was launched against icons, which swiftly led to wide-scale destruction especially when the cause became official imperial policy under Leo III (717–41), something that had occurred at the latest by 730 when the iconophile patriarch Germanos was deposed. The most famous individual act of iconoclasm in this initial period was the destruction of the icon of Christ above the Chalke, the main gate to the imperial palace, but this was just one among many acts of destruction. Iconoclasm generated large-scale dissension within Byzantium, even leading to rebellions and revolts, and conflict with the rest of Christendom, especially the papacy. The controversy intensified under Constantine V (741–75). Notably he convened the iconoclast Council of Hieria in 754 and purged any remaining icons. His more stringent iconoclasm created even greater opposition led by the monks, with the first iconophile martyrs in the 760s. Constantine's radicalism only increased, attacking both monasticism

6 Compare the very different positions of Louis Bréhier, *La querelle des images* (VIII^e–IX^e siècles) (Paris: 1904); George Ostrogorsky, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (Breslau: 1929); idem, "Les débuts de la querelle des images," in *Mélanges Charles Diehl*, 2 vols (Paris: 1930), vol. 1, 235–55, and idem, *History of the Byzantine State*, trans. Joan Hussey (rev. ed. New Brunswick, NJ: 1969); Edward Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London: 1930); André Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Paris: 1936), and idem, *L'iconoclasm byzantin: Dossier archéologique* (Paris: 1957); Gerhart Ladner, "Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Mediaeval Studies* 2 (1940), 127–49, and idem, "The Concept of the Image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *DOP* 7 (1953), 1–34; George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* 19 (1950), 77–96; Norman Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," *The Harvard Theological Review* 44 (1951), 93–106; Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150; and Paul Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: 1958).

and the cult of saints. Constantine's violent radicalism dimmed the popularity of iconoclasm, and following the death of his more moderate son Leo IV (775–80), Irene (797–802), the regent for the infant Constantine VI (780–97) was able to restore icons, convening the Council of Nicaea in 787.

The subsequent period often called the “Iconophile Intermission” was punctuated by crises and ended in 815 when Leo V (813–20), convinced that he could secure his reign by modelling himself on the iconoclast rulers, reinstated iconoclasm. Once more the icon on the Chalke gate that had been restored by Irene was removed, and the status of Hiereia re-established. This second phase of iconoclasm was more moderate, with less destruction and opposition, and more marked by intellectual debate, though the quality of that debate was disputed. Again, the controversy waxed and waned, with more active bouts of destruction and persecution under Leo V and Theophilos (829–42) and a lull under the largely uninterested Michael II (820–29). This time around iconoclasm did not seem to bring any earthly success and, faced by widespread iconophile resistance, was abandoned for the final time in 843 under the regime of a second female regent, Theodora, the widow of Theophilos and mother of Michael III (842–67).⁷

Alongside this overarching narrative was general agreement on the scale and overall significance of the dispute, even if different interpretations of the precise meaning were given. For instance, Gerhart Ladner declared: “the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy ... was one of the greatest political and cultural crises of Byzantium”.⁸ George Florovsky agreed: “the iconoclastic controversy was undoubtedly one of the major conflicts in the history of the Christian Church. ... All levels of life were affected by the conflict, all strata of society were involved in the struggle. The fight was violent, bitter, and desperate.”⁹ George Ostrogorsky, in his magisterial and hugely influential *History of the Byzantine State*, set an enduring pattern by naming his chapter on the

7 For a highly readable synthesis see Martin, *History*. See also Ostrogorsky, *History*, 147–209.

8 Ladner, “Origin and Significance,” 127. Ladner stridently argued that iconoclasm was the direct emanation of the theory of Caesaropapism, the idea that the emperor should dominate the Church like a pope. In Ladner's view the iconoclast emperors sought to re-establish diminished imperial authority by both reclaiming the power of previous emperors such as Justinian to regulate the Church, and to reverse the marginalization of imperial imagery by icons, an idea drawn from the work of Grabar.

9 Florovsky, “Origin, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy,” 77. Florovsky was a keen proponent of the argument that iconoclasm was essentially a religious conflict, rejecting the emphasis on the political common to work produced in the early 20th century. He also argued that the theological debate was frequently sophisticated, and that both sides drew on established strands in Christian thought.

period “The Age of the Iconoclast Crisis”, and argued that “the crisis ... characterized this epoch and made the Empire the scene of severe internal struggles for more than a century”.¹⁰ To these scholars Byzantine iconoclasm was indisputably the main event of the period.

The following generation of scholarship continued much of this tradition, while refining elements and rejecting certain strands. An excellent example of this is the aforementioned 1973 work by Peter Brown. In this subtle argument Brown first rejected several then popular explanations of Byzantine iconoclasm, for instance cogently denying any straightforward role of the army or the supposed anti-Hellenism of the eastern provinces.¹¹ Marginalized too was the role of Christology, which only became a feature of the debate in the 750s.¹² Direct influence from Jews and Muslims was also rejected, with Byzantine iconoclasm resolutely declared “endogenic: it was a crisis within Byzantine Christianity itself.”¹³ Instead Brown developed his arguments from the seminal 1954 article by Ernst Kitzinger that argued that the cult of icons only truly emerged in Byzantium from the middle of the 6th century, and that iconoclasm was the eventual response.¹⁴ Brown, however, recast this by grounding the rise of icons within a wider history of the holy in late antique Christianity. For Brown, icons were intimately entwined with the late antique phenomenon of the holy man, as “the holy man was a living icon”, someone whose holiness meant he could act as an intercessor with the heavenly court and sway the almighty towards mercy.¹⁵ When the living holy man became a saint in heaven, other physical means were necessary to access this channel of holiness. This

10 Ostrogorsky, *History*, 160. While Ostrogorsky noted the importance of the rise of the icon and preexisting strands in Christian thought hostile to images, he emphasized the role of the eastern provinces as traditional incubators of heresies, the influence of Judaism and Islam, and the general political context.

11 The first built on Walter Kaegi, “The Byzantine Armies and Iconoclasm,” *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966), 48–70.

12 For a reaction arguing for the centrality of theological issues to iconoclasm, see Patrick Henry, “What was the Iconoclastic Controversy About?” *Church History* 45 (1976), 16–31.

13 Brown, “Dark Age,” 2.

14 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images.” Probably no other single work has been as influential in the scholarship on Byzantine iconoclasm, though it itself was heavily based on the texts identified by Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder* (Leipzig: 1899). Indeed, the very term iconoclasm to describe the controversy was popularised by this article; see Jan Bremmer, “Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: Notes towards a Genealogy,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 88 (2008), 1–17. The Byzantines themselves tended to talk about iconomachy—literally the “struggle/war over/against images”—probably a more accurate reflection. Yet the term iconoclasm is so embedded in the scholarship that we have kept it, just as Brubaker and Haldon have.

15 Brown, “Dark Age,” 12.

led to the cult of relics, and then from the 6th century the cult of icons. What made both holy men and icons potentially dangerous were that they lay outside the institutional structures of the Church. They acted as centrifugal forces, dissipating access to the holy through numerous unconsecrated channels. Any suspicions, however, were muted until the threat of the Arabs made the need to propitiate divine wrath so pressing that it required a new solution, as the old ones such as enforcing orthodoxy were clearly insufficient. The iconoclasts found their answer by turning to the Old Testament and seeing themselves more than ever before in Byzantine history as the new Chosen People found the cause for God's anger in idolatry, the most common and grievous of the old Israelites' sins. Rather than allow holiness to be scattered, the iconoclasts were centralizers, focusing on those symbols and means to the holy that were truly ancient and utterly embedded within the Church, notably the cross and the Eucharist. Inevitably this led to conflict with those other successors of holy men, monks. "Iconomachy in action is monachomachy", with iconoclasm a campaign seeking to break the unregulated power of the holy.¹⁶

A similar but in some ways more radical recasting of the debate was undertaken by Stephen Gero in two monographs dedicated to iconoclasm respectively under Leo III and Constantine V.¹⁷ Much of these is devoted to the sources, both bringing in under-examined material from Armenia and the Caliphate and subjecting the Byzantine sources to renewed examination. The marked difference between the largely glowing press for the Isaurian emperors in the eastern sources, whose iconoclasm is entirely unremarked, and the vitriolic attacks in the extant Byzantine material allowed Gero to highlight the extent to which the latter distorted the record. In particular Gero was the first scholar to systematically trace the emergence of the legend that Leo III was directly inspired by the contemporary iconoclasm of Caliph Yazid II, himself led astray by a Jewish wizard. For Gero the direct linking of Byzantine iconoclasm to events in the Caliphate was an iconophile calumny. Gero argued that while iconoclasm was always an imperial heresy, its character changed noticeably. Iconoclasm began as a conservative, rigorist movement under Leo that was entirely about the Old Testament's commandments against idolatry. Mentions of criticisms of the Virgin, the cult of saints, relics, and monks by Leo are almost certainly more iconophile propaganda. Then in the 750s, led by Constantine, the iconoclast argument engaged with Christological

16 Brown, "Dark Age," 30.

17 Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III, With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: 1973); and idem, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V, With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: 1977).

arguments that sought to prove that the making or venerating of images of Christ was heretical. It was only in the 760s that Constantine embraced a more radical agenda, criticizing the cult of saints and relics, in a failed “proto-Reformation” that was swiftly abandoned following his death.¹⁸ Perhaps the most notable aspect of Gero’s work was the downsizing of the controversy. In his telling iconoclasm is still important, and the level of destruction and persecution significant, but not as all-consuming and total as older works, following our iconophile sources, argue. Rather it was an episodic phenomenon, and one process among others. Indeed, the most spectacular moments of persecution in the 760s had little or nothing to do with iconoclasm, but rather with Constantine’s radical agenda that included attacks on monasticism. For Gero, iconomachy—“war on icons”—did not necessarily lead to monachomachy—“war on monks.” Rather, Constantine persecuted monks because he was anti-monasticism.

Another landmark publication appeared in 1977 with the volume of conference proceedings edited by Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin.¹⁹ Almost inevitably a collection of essays has a greater multitude of viewpoints than a single-authored work, but some strands stand out. Again, the source problem is a recurring issue, and there is a guarded scepticism throughout. For instance, Cyril Mango in his introduction notes that the totality of our literary material is not huge, and that there are limits to what we can reconstruct.²⁰ Indeed, several contributors cast doubt on some of our iconophile sources’ claims, arguing that the level of destruction and persecution was varying and far from total. There is also a recognition that iconoclasm was not the sole or defining feature of the age. Mango also highlighted that the key problem is not why iconoclasm happened, but why it happened when it did. In that regard, the immediate context of the 720s and the decades preceding it were vital. This conclusion was fully supported by Judith Herrin who highlighted the role played by the political anarchy Byzantium faced between 695 and 717, when there were seven changes of emperor and repeated military defeats.²¹ Therefore, the Arab conquests’ role in destabilizing Byzantium and posing the most obvious indication of divine wrath was critical to the emergence

18 Stephen Gero, “Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Failure of a Medieval Reformation,” in Joseph Gutmann (ed.), *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Missoula, MT: 1977), 49–62.

19 Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham* (Birmingham: 1977).

20 Cyril Mango, “Historical Introduction,” in Bryer and Herrin, *Iconoclasm*, 1–6.

21 Judith Herrin, “The Context of Iconoclast Reform,” in Bryer and Herrin, *Iconoclasm*, 15–20.

of iconoclasm. Another important paper was given by Sebastian Brock, who demonstrated that, *pace* much older scholarship, there was no link between the heresy of Monophysitism and iconoclasm, and that this was yet another iconophile smear. Brock also independently offered an analysis similar to Brown's when he argued that the core of the controversy was between those who wanted to confine the divine to a few, official objects, and those who argued for a more profuse scattering of the holy.²² Ihor Ševčenko furthered the general source-criticism by noting how the vast majority of the hagiography purporting to record the lives of saints in the period was produced after 843 and is distinctly suspect.²³ He also demonstrated how one could reimagine the period by creatively rereading the sources, in his case by arguing that several surviving lives were originally "iconoclast" in that they ignored the image question and instead focused on personal piety, depicting their saintly heroes less as miracle-working extreme ascetics but as humble practitioners of virtue and charity to be emulated by ordinary Christians.

The stream of articles and monographs dedicated to Byzantine iconoclasm became a flood in the 1980s and 1990s, continuing into the early 2000s. To mention only a few, the problems of the sources, especially those for the First Iconoclasm and the decades leading up to it, have attracted detailed work by, *inter alios*, Dietrich Stein and Hans Georg Thümmel.²⁴ In a series of important articles Averil Cameron refined the work of Kitzinger and Brown by focusing on the developments that took place in the second half of the 6th century.²⁵ Cameron powerfully argues that, faced by debilitating warfare and the disaster of the plague, Byzantine culture, led by the imperial court, reorientated itself. The remaining elements of classicism seen in the early years of Justinian I were marginalized, and instead the Christian elements of late antique culture

22 Sebastian Brock, "Iconoclasm and the Monophysites," in Bryer and Herrin, *Iconoclasm*, 53–57.

23 Ihor Ševčenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period," in Bryer and Herrin, *Iconoclasm*, 113–31.

24 Dietrich Stein, *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreites und seine Entwicklung bis in die 40er Jahre des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: 1980). Hans Georg Thümmel has been prolific on the subject of iconoclasm and not just on its sources; see *inter alia*: *Bilderlehre und Bilderstreit: Arbeiten zur Auseinandersetzung über die Ikone und ihre Begründung vornehmlich im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: 1991), and *idem*, *Die Frühgeschichte der ostkirchlichen Bilderlehre: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Zeit vor dem Bilderstreit* (Berlin: 1992).

25 Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Constantinople," *Past & Present* 84 (1979), 3–35; *eadem*, "The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story," in *Okeanos: Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko* (Cambridge: 1983), 80–94; and *eadem*, "Language of Images".

and the model of the Old Testament were increasingly dominant. This was the environment in which icons and their cult emerged, most spectacularly in the case of the *acheiropoieta*, the images of Christ miraculously “not-made-by-human-hands,” which first appeared at this time. The new imperial ideology helped the empire survive the coming centuries, and provided a direct inspiration for the Isaurians, the difference being that in the intervening years the failure of icons to staunch the decline helped the iconoclasts to identify images as the problem rather than the solution. Others expertly examined the evolving theology of the dispute and especially the impact of Aristotelian philosophy during Second Iconoclasm, including the work of Ken Parry—a contributor to this volume—and Charles Barber, who skilfully combined theology with art-historical analysis.²⁶

The work of two scholars in particular should be highlighted for their more radical scepticism and fundamental recasting of the subject. First, the many works of Marie-France Auzépy—another contributor to this *Companion*—have further interrogated our sources, arguing that the level of iconophile invention was far higher than previously thought.²⁷ Notably this included a 1990 article that questioned the factual reality of the destruction of the Chalke icon by Leo III, the single most famous act of iconoclasm and the traditional starting point of the controversy.²⁸ Auzépy’s key insight was that the sources reporting this famous event are hostile and late, produced during the dying days of the Iconophile Intermission when anxious iconophiles, sensing the raising support for iconoclasm that was linked to the positive memory of the Isaurian emperors, sought to rewrite history in order to blacken the reputation of the iconoclasts. Auzépy dedicated considerable attention to one of those sources, the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, a key text providing information about First Iconoclasm.²⁹ This, she demonstrated, was a highly tendentious text that was better evidence of the successive rewriting of the period in ever more negative ways than for what actually occurred. By stripping out the iconophile

26 Ken Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: 1996); Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: 2002).

27 See the collected essays in Marie-France Auzépy, *L’histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris: 2007).

28 Marie-France Auzépy, “La destruction de l’icône du Christ de la Chalce par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?” *Byzantion* 40 (1990), 445–92. For the scholarly debate since see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 128–35.

29 Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le diacre* (Aldershot: 1997); and *L’hagiographie et l’iconoclisme byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d’Étienne le Jeune* (Aldershot: 1999).

propaganda and reading against the grain, Auzépy offers a very different narrative of iconoclasm and the period.³⁰ Iconoclasm firmly was not the dominant phenomenon, but rather needs to be explained through the wider changes to Byzantium. Rather than being an all-consuming affair, iconoclasm was notably episodic. The Isaurians were not the boorish tyrants of iconophile legend, but very successful rulers under whom the empire recovered, a recovery that included a revival of learning and the arts. The level of icon destruction at the beginning was small, with efforts firmly aimed at curtailing acts of veneration rather than smashing icons condemned as idols. However, after the Council of Hieria in 754 efforts were significantly ramped up as iconoclasm became the official dogma of the Church, reinforced in the 760s by a universal oath not to venerate icons. Nor were the iconoclasts aberrations who rejected core tenets of Orthodoxy such as intercession, the cult of saints, relics, and monasticism. Rather they considered themselves, with justification, the true defenders of Orthodoxy attacking a relatively recent addition to Orthodox practice. As reforming rigorists promoting a more spiritual version of Christianity, they did undertake certain reforms, such as removing relics from altars to keep them centred on the Eucharist, reforms that could be presented by their enemies as more radical than they were. While there was some persecution of some monks in the 760s and 770s, this was not because they were monks, as most monks were at least nominally iconoclast and left alone. Rather it was due to a mixture of the aftermath of a failed plot and a desire to reform some monasteries.

Even more radically revisionist was the work of Paul Speck.³¹ He argued for an even greater level of iconophile intervention, with large-scale mythmaking and the rewriting of texts. Indeed, Speck identified interpolations everywhere. Interpolations are insertions into texts by later hands and are a very common occurrence in ancient and medieval texts. They can be identified through a sudden break in style, grammar, or subject, the latter especially noticeable if it includes anachronistic information. Most are relatively small and harmless and do little to change the meaning of the original. However, there have always been some documents in Byzantine iconoclasm that aroused suspicions among

30 Marie-France Auzépy, "State of Emergency (700–850)," in Jonathan Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492* (Cambridge: 2008), 251–91.

31 Among his many works see Paul Speck, *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren*, (Poikila Byzantina) 2 (Bonn: 1981); *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus*, (Poikila Byzantina) 10 (Bonn: 1990); "Wunderheilige und Bilder: Zur Frage des Beginns der Bilderverehrung," *Varia III*, (Poikila Byzantina) 11 (Bonn: 1991), 163–247; *Kaiser Leon III., die Geschichtswerke des Nikephoros und des Theophanes und der Liber Pontificalis: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*, (Poikila Byzantina) 19–20 (Bonn: 2002–03).

some scholars that something greater and more pernicious had occurred. It is beyond doubt that both sides in the debate engaged in some doctoring of their texts. For example, there is widespread agreement that the letters purporting to be from Pope Gregory II to Leo III, in which the emperor is accused of declaring himself “emperor and priest”, are either entirely forgeries or so interpolated as to be impossible to use with any safety.³² Likewise, Gregory’s letter to Patriarch Germanos is almost certainly heavily interpolated with a long addition that presented the iconophile defence of images.³³ Speck endorsed and refined existing sceptical arguments, for instance building on Gero’s work to demonstrate the evolution from the late 8th century onwards of the story that iconoclasm began in the Caliphate, and that Byzantine iconoclasts were thus inspired by Jews and Muslims. Speck though also greatly expanded the number of texts he deemed to have been tampered with. Indeed, he argued that the whole textual corpus underpinning Kitzinger’s theory on the rise of the icon from the mid-6th century was tainted by iconophile interpolations seeking to prove the antiquity of icon veneration, and that in fact the rise of the cult of icons was a much later phenomenon. Speck also redated two key works, the treatises of John of Damascus and the long final letter of Germanos to Thomas of Klaudiopolis preserved in the *acta* of Nicaea II to the late 740s.³⁴ By doing so he both minimized the extent of the dispute under Leo III and the role of Leo in it almost to the point of non-existence. Speck was also very sceptical of the extent of physical destruction of icons beyond a few largely symbolic episodes.

While Brubaker and Haldon do not adopt all of Speck’s conclusions, and nuance others, they do endorse the majority. They then weave these together with the work of others, including Auzépy, both on iconoclasm and Byzantium in general during the period.³⁵ The result is a massive and closely argued synthesis in which one can see the culmination of many strands of scholarship. The first is a highly sceptical approach to the sources. Interpolations and rewriting abound, as successive waves of iconophiles rewrote the past to

32 Jean Gouillard, “Aux origines de l’iconoclisme: Le témoignage de Grégoire III?” *TM* 3 (1968), 276–305.

33 For a summary of this letter and the debate around it, see Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), 2 vols (Liverpool: 2018), 251–52.

34 For a rejection of this dating see the chapters by Price, Humphreys, and Louth in the present *Companion*.

35 For instance, there is an intense dialogue with the detailed work of Wolfram Brandes on the evolution of the Byzantine state in this period, especially his *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Administration im 6.-9. Jahrhundert*. (Frankfurt: 2002).

justify their position and smear their opponents. Such a reading allows for a markedly different narrative from traditional accounts and a notable downsizing of the overall significance and intensity of the conflict. For instance, they admit something happened under Leo III, but most certainly there was no general edict ordering mass destruction. Indeed, Leo himself was not really an iconoclast, and could even be characterized as being pro-images. What debate there was, was principally conducted by bishops. This only changed under Constantine V, who did institutionalize iconoclasm at Hieria, but even then the extent of destruction was limited. Indeed, Constantine should be remembered as a patron of the arts rather than a destroyer. During Second Iconoclasm the extent of destruction was even more limited. Likewise, the scale of persecution was small and fitful, as was the resistance to iconoclasm. Certainly, the tales of monks resisting *en masse* as the prime champions of icons are pure mythmaking. At no point were the iconoclasts against monks or against saints or relics; these were all iconophile smears alongside the ideas that they were influenced by Jews, Muslims, or heretics such as the Monophysites. Rather they were essentially mainstream Orthodox Christians.

What they were reacting against was the recent, from ca. 680, transformation of images of Christ and the saints into icons through which the holy person depicted could be manifested, thus making unconsecrated and uncontrollable icons into something akin to relics. Any mentions of icon veneration before this point are either interpolations or referring to the *acheiropoieta* images, which were relics. This transformation of images into icons was driven by a general anxiety that arose chiefly due to the losses to the Arabs. At the same time these defeats made both Church and State focus even more on a need to purify society in order to regain divine favour, though these efforts had precedents that went back to at least the early 7th century. A generation later, in the 720s, these two forces came together in the first attempts to crush the newly widespread practice of icon veneration. Therefore, Islam and the Arab conquests played a critical role, but a distinctly indirect one. The contemporary wave of iconoclasm in Palestine was a separate phenomenon, and anyway the edict of Yazid II was probably an iconophile fabrication.

Theology, and especially Christology, was a lagging force, reacting to and justifying events rather than propelling them. By the end of the controversy, a theology of images had emerged to substantiate a fully grounded cult of images. However, the theology so carefully established by Nikephoros and Theodore the Studite only ever captures one part, and the lesser one, of what an icon is. The iconophile theology, drawing heavily on Aristotle, depicts the icon as merely an artefact, different in essence but sharing a likeness with the holy person represented. Therefore, the icon itself is not venerated, but

is just a signpost to the one venerated. This saves the icon from the charge of being an idol. But, Brubaker and Haldon argue, outside of learned theological tracts even Theodore himself treated icons in a very different way, as if they were manifestations of the holy person. It was this belief in the real presence of a saint in an icon that emerged around 680, and it was this that drove the controversy.

Iconoclasm failed in part due to the iconoclasts being outmanoeuvred in certain factional battles, especially in the 780s, and the limited nature of enforcement, largely only a major factor in the generation from 750. It is also much harder to sustain a policy that limited access to the sacred than one that legitimized it. Finally, the iconophiles over the generations waged a successful propaganda campaign that so blackened the reputations of the iconoclasts that any revival became unthinkable.

These and the many other arguments, both particular and general, have elicited much debate and a wide range of reactions.³⁶ What all can agree on is that to understand Byzantine iconoclasm one must have some idea of the context in which the debate took place.

2 The Context: Byzantium before and during Iconoclasm

2.1 *The Christian Roman Empire from Constantine I to Justinian I*

What was Byzantium? This seemingly easy question is very difficult to answer as no place in history ever did call itself the “Byzantine Empire”. Rather, “Byzantium” is a term first invented by 16th-century humanists to distinguish the polity that was centred on Constantinople from its classical Roman forebear, despite the fact that to its very destruction in 1453 it claimed to be the Roman Empire. That Roman identity, and the inheritance of Roman notions and practices of power was one vital strand of what we might anachronistically call “Byzantine-ness”. Another was the Greek language and, through it,

36 For instance, see the differing views on iconoclasm in Averil Cameron, “The Anxiety of Images: Meanings and Material Objects,” in Angeliki Lymberopoulou (ed.), *Images of the Byzantine World: Visions, Messages and Meanings. Studies Presented to Leslie Brubaker* (Farnham: 2011), 47–56; Jaś Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium,” *Art Bulletin* 94 (2012), 368–94; Judith Herrin, “What Caused Iconoclasm?” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65 (2014), 857–66, and eadem, “Was Iconoclasm a Christian Heresy?,” in Richard Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Heresy* (Cambridge: forthcoming); and Andrew Louth, “A Review of *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850: A History* by Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 63 (2013), 289–93.

access to the classical Greek past. Then there was Orthodox Christianity, which over the centuries became bound up with every aspect of Byzantine culture.³⁷

Given such complexity, it is no wonder that there is no agreed start date for when Byzantium began. However, for the purposes of this volume, the complex and ever-shifting cultural amalgam that we can call Byzantium emerged in its first incarnation between the reigns of Constantine I (306–337) and Justinian I (527–65). More than any other emperors these two set the precedents against which future Byzantine emperors were judged.³⁸ They also did more than any other to create the centre stage of Byzantine life by founding and embellishing the city of Constantinople. While Constantine founded the city of New or Second Rome, Justinian rebuilt large stretches of it, in particular gifting the city the cathedral of Hagia Sophia, which thereafter dominated Constantinople's skyline and formed the centre of the Eastern Orthodox Church until 1453. Most significantly, the conversion of Constantine began the Christianization of the Roman Empire. While this was a gradual and piecemeal process that took many generations to complete, what matters to us is that by the end of Justinian's reign it was essentially complete. Byzantium became both the Christian and Roman Empire, the two terms almost, if not quite, coterminous.

Christianization involved many aspects.³⁹ The most obvious is that the vast majority of the population were Christian by the 6th century. Of course, one can debate the extent to which the "average" Christian, if there is ever such a thing, knew or cared about certain aspects of the religion. Furthermore, there were still non-Christians, with the Jews a particularly important if increasingly

37 For an introduction to Byzantium see Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London: 1980), and Jonathan Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492* (Cambridge: 2008). For an account that emphasizes the Roman side of the equation, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA: 2019).

38 For the memory of Constantine see Paul Magdalino (ed.), *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries* (Aldershot: 1994). For that of Justinian, see Günter Prinzing, "Das Bild Justinians in der Überlieferung der Byzantiner vom 7. bis 15. Jahrhundert" *Fontes Minores* 7 (1986), 1–99. For introductions to their specific reigns and the periods they dominated, see respectively Noel Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge: 2006), and Michael Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: 2005).

39 For an introduction to this and late antiquity in general see the many works of Peter Brown, including *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: 1995), and idem, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (2nd ed., Oxford: 2003). See also Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, CT: 1997), and Augustine Casiday and Frederick Norris (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 2: Constantine to c.600* (Cambridge: 2007).

marginalised community.⁴⁰ However, it is undeniable that Christianity had been transformed during the period from being a persecuted faith held by a scattered few into the sole state religion followed in some form by the overwhelming majority. In contrast, the traditional pagan cults confronted by conversion, confiscation of property, and increasingly heavy legal penalties, all but disappeared.

Conversion and the associated flows of patronage revolutionized the wealth of the Church.⁴¹ Both cities and countryside increasingly filled with churches and shrines, reorientating the landscape around Christianity. Within the city, bishops became ever more important, even domineering, figures.⁴² The Church became an institution that was embedded into every level and aspect of Roman society, whose collective social, cultural, and economic resources made it a force that emperors and elites had to engage with.

Despite, or perhaps because, of these triumphs, the Church was torn over many issues. Indeed, this was the era in which many of the fundamental problems inherent to Christianity were painfully thrashed out, in the process creating confessional divides that survive to this day. This struggle reveals one aspect where Christianity was notably different from other faiths. It had a creed, a defined set of beliefs about God, and—at least according to the most ardent—salvation was only possible if one adhered to the correct faith, or “orthodoxy”. Those who deviated from the orthodox were branded heretics. With the salvation of souls at stake, no wonder that debates could be highly acrimonious.⁴³

The debate that would do most to split Christianity was over the nature of Christ. Essentially all agreed that God had taken on flesh in the Incarnation as Jesus Christ, but what precisely did that mean? How did the human and divine aspects interact? One answer proffered by Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople 428–31, was that Christ had two distinct *hypostases* or personhoods, one divine and the other human. As such, he refused to call the Virgin Mary, whose cult was becoming popular, *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”), as the divine Godhead could not have been born of a woman. This Christology was condemned at the third ecumenical or universal council of the Church

40 For Jews in Byzantium see the various works of Nicolas de Lange, including “Jews in the Age of Justinian,” in Maas, *Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: 2005), 401–26.

41 For the theological problems this brought, see Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: 2014).

42 Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: 2005).

43 On the extent of religious violence, see Michael Gaddis, *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkeley: 2005).

held at Ephesus in 431. Instead, the single *hypostasis* of Christ was proclaimed. Those who followed Nestorius were denied the name Christian, and the heretics were instead branded Nestorians. Reacting to the separation of divine and human by Nestorius, a different Christology emphasized their unity by saying that Christ also had one nature, *physis*, that was human and divine. These “Monophysites” were condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 that declared Christ had two natures joined in one person. While Nestorianism found little purchase inside the empire and so could largely be ignored, the Monophysite or Miaphysite position was followed by many, especially in Syria and Egypt. For that reason, debate between those who accepted and rejected Chalcedon would trouble the Church and the empire for the next two and half centuries.⁴⁴

This is a distinctly simplified account of a complex debate. In reality, there was considerable nuance and a spectrum of opinion behind the monolithic terms. However, for our purposes it was this simplified history that was remembered by the Byzantines and, as we will see, was used in the iconoclast debate. Moreover, a major point in branding one’s opponent as a heretic was to delegitimize them rather than studiously engage with their ideas. Hence, when iconoclasts and iconophiles heaped opprobrium and hurled insults at each other they were following in the footsteps of the Fathers. Another even more critical legacy from this period was the language that developed. Terms like orthodox and heretic, Nestorian and Monophysite, *hypostasis* and *physis* became central to the lexicon of Orthodox Christianity. It was with this shared language that iconoclasts and iconophiles would attack each other.

Another legacy was the way in which these disputes were meant to be settled. Thanks to the conversion of Constantine, for the first time in Christian history a council or synod of bishops representing the whole Church could be convened, the first meeting at Nicaea in 325. The principal business of these ecumenical councils was to establish and proclaim orthodoxy. Moreover, by 451 a definition of what constituted an ecumenical council had emerged, namely that it had to have representation from the five patriarchates, who were in order of seniority: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

The calling of an ecumenical council was the prerogative and duty of the emperor, and the complex and contested relationship between Church and emperor is yet another aspect of late antiquity that would influence Byzantine iconoclasm. Constantine I himself set an array of precedents. On the one

44 John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: 1989).

hand he called the first ecumenical council. Over the next two centuries, 5 councils were held, and with each iteration the association between being a pious emperor and convening an ecumenical council increased. At the same time, Constantine seems not to have felt entirely bound by the council's decisions, negotiating directly with those condemned at Nicaea.⁴⁵ Likewise his successors used an array of options when it came to managing the divisions within the Church, ranging from persecution to essentially ignoring the issue. However, given the gradual but progressive Christianization of imperial ideology, the latter option proved hard to sustain.⁴⁶ After all, how could a pious Christian emperor not seek to uphold orthodoxy? At the same time, the ideological imperative of having a united Church and the practical need not to alienate too many subjects at once encouraged emperors to seek consensus. To the ardent extremes, however, compromise imperilled souls. Moreover, countering the belief that an emperor should intervene was another that bishops should not bow to the will of the emperor on theological matters. Given all these conflicting ideas, pressures, and interests, it is little surprise that late antique emperors spent considerable time entangled in theological struggles, often to little avail.

The fundamental reason why emperors were always eventually drawn into these struggles was ideological. It was a basic assumption of the ancient world that worldly success, most obviously manifest in military victory, could only be ensured through divine favour. Christianity did not change this fundamental belief. Victory continued to be central to imperial ideology and was claimed to flow from God's support.⁴⁷ For instance, we are explicitly told by Eusebius that Constantine converted to Christianity in the context of preparing for war and in search of a divine protector. The result was his famous vision in the sky of a cross made of light, with the attached slogan "By this sign conquer".⁴⁸ From this point on the cross was a symbol associated with the emperors and imperial victory. This vision also served to accelerate the rise of the cross to its status as the preeminent symbol of Christianity. By the later 4th century the relic of the True Cross on which Christ had suffered had been discovered in Jerusalem, supposedly by Constantine's mother Helena. This drew pilgrims from across

45 For Constantine and the Church, see Harold Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: 2002).

46 Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: 1991).

47 Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: 1986).

48 Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann (Berlin: 1991), 1.28–32.

the Christian world, who showed their veneration by prostrating themselves before it and kissing it. Portions of the relic would be distributed over time, the largest of which was housed in the imperial palace in Constantinople, which received the same veneration. Soon this budding cult of the cross was extended to the symbol and not just the relic. Christianity now had its preeminent symbol and it was one intimately entwined with the emperors.⁴⁹

If victory was a manifestation of divine approval, the reverse was also true. Hence, when disaster struck, one needed to propitiate divine wrath. Again, Christianity did not alter this fundamental impulse. What Christianity changed was the rhetorical and symbolic representation of that response. In particular, the Old Testament's narrative of the fluctuating fortunes of the Israelites, the Chosen People who were blessed for their adherence to God's law and punished for their transgressions, was an obvious model on which to map the current trials and tribulations of the new elect of the Christian Roman Empire. Christianity also provided specific remedies. One was to enforce orthodoxy. Another was to morally reform society. This last, of course, was hardly confined to Christianity. The idea that heaven would be angered either by the personal immorality of the ruler or general immorality among the population was also ancient. However, the specifics of Christian sins were often different, such as Christianity's abnormally strict views on sexual matters.⁵⁰ Furthermore, late antique Christianity offered institutions that were meant to lead the people in the quashing of sin. Hence the drive to reform almost inevitably led emperors to regulate the Church and to that new phenomenon, monasticism.

Taking Christ's call to sell all their possessions and follow him literally, increasing numbers of lay Christians renounced the material ties of family, sex, and property and engaged in fasting, prayer, and mortification of the flesh in order to bring themselves closer to heaven. The most advanced practitioners of this spiritual elite were deemed to have succeeded to the extent that they could even perform miracles, or at least that it was their hagiographers claimed.⁵¹ Increasingly, death did not stop this new mode of holiness. Rather, dead holy men joined the martyrs of the early Church, around whom a cult of

49 Robin Jensen, *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: 2017).

50 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: 1988). See also Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: 2013).

51 See again the many works of Peter Brown, including *The Cult of the Saints: Its Use and Function in Latin Christianity* (London: 1981). For a critical appreciation of Brown's work see James Howard-Johnston and Paul Hayward (eds.), *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford: 1999).

remembrance had already emerged, as saints in heaven who could still act as patrons and dispensers of miracles after death. In a world as hierarchical as that of the Roman Empire, it was only natural that many sought to navigate the heavenly court just as they would the terrestrial one, by looking for a saintly patron to hear their troubles and intercede for them. Furthermore, the belief emerged that prayers to the saint would be most efficacious in the presence of their material remains. These relics were paid the same marks of veneration, such as kissing and prostration, as would have been given to the living holy man. Over time the holiness seeped even further, as items that had material contact with relics, such as oil passed over a saint's bones, could in turn perform miracles. Asceticism thus turbocharged the emerging cult of the saints and relics.

Of course, only the tiniest proportion of ascetics became saints. The vast majority lived humbler lives. However, particularly when gathered together in a monastery, their collective force could be huge. Culturally, monasteries quickly became powerhouses of learning, creating and copying texts. In particular, they were likely to generate hagiographies, saints' lives, especially of those holy men who had founded their community and whose relics they possessed. Economically, over the generations they accumulated vast collective wealth, in the process forging complex relationships with local elites and the rest of society. This material power was matched by a spiritual one. While an ordinary monk could not command miracles like a living saint, their collective prayer was claimed to be able to intercede for the less holy. Like the bishops, monks and monasteries had by the 6th century become an integral and powerful feature of late antique society.

All these trends reached a watershed during the reign of Justinian I. Seen above all in the torrent of legislation he issued, Justinian embraced and reformulated the role of Christian Roman emperor like none before.⁵² The drive to restore diminished imperial glory and authority saw intense reform of law, administration, and the army. North Africa and Italy were reconquered. Justinian also attempted to solve the long-running Christological dispute through a mix of negotiation, coercion, and subtle theological and semantic massaging of Chalcedon to address some of the complaints of the

52 For the reign of Justinian see Maas, *Age of Justinian*; Mischa Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n.Chr.* (Göttingen: 2003); Peter Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: 2006); and idem, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700* (Oxford: 2011), 125–82.

non-Chalcedonians. He even issued a letter, treatise, and edict on doctrinal matters.⁵³

While Justinian failed to bridge the divide with the Monophysites and in the process also alienated some Chalcedonians in his pursuit of a refined theology, he demonstrated just how far an emperor could lead a theological debate rather than merely enforce the stated will of bishops. Indeed, Justinian's theological manoeuvres formed the basis for the fifth ecumenical council he convened in Constantinople in 553, which despite the outward appearance of being run by the patriarch was clearly closely co-ordinated by Justinian, who also pressured the pope, then resident in Constantinople, to sign.⁵⁴

How Justinian viewed his role in society and relationship with the Church is best expressed in the preface to Novel 6, issued in 535:

The greatest gifts that God, in his celestial benevolence, has bestowed on mankind are the priesthood (*sacerdotium*) and sovereignty (*imperium*), the one serving on matters divine, and the other ruling over human affairs, and caring for them. Thus nothing could have as great a claim on the attention of sovereigns as the honour of priests, seeing that they are the very ones who constantly offer prayer to God on the sovereign's behalf. Hence, should the one be above reproach in every respect, and enjoy access to God, while the other keeps in correct and proper order the realm that has been entrusted to it, there will be satisfactory harmony, conferring every conceivable benefit on the human race.⁵⁵

Not only were *sacerdotium* and *imperium* both instituted by God, but it was the duty of the emperor to ensure the purity of the former so that it could pray for the latter. Therefore, the emperor had to regulate every aspect of the Church, including upholding orthodoxy. Justinian proceeded to do so with relish. He produced so much legislation touching on clerics and monks, which was then taken up into canon law, that he effectively transformed canon as well as civil law. In all this Justinian set a pattern for how future emperors could and should behave.

53 Justinian I, *Drei dogmatische Schriften Justinians.*, ed. Eduard Schwartz (Munich: 1939).

54 For an excellent overview of the topic as well as a translation of the council, see Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553*, 2 vols (Liverpool: 2009).

55 Novel 6, ed. Rudolf Schöll and Wilhelm Kroll, vol. 3 of *Corpus iuris civilis* (6th ed., Berlin: 1928), trans. David Miller and Peter Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian* (Cambridge: 2018), 97–98.

2.2 *The Empire That Almost Died*

Justinian's reign not only represents a culmination of trends long in motion, it was also a turning point. From the 530s on, successive and increasingly heavy hammer blows fell on the later Roman Empire. The string of victories won in the early years of Justinian's reign turned into defeats and grinding warfare in the 540s. In particular, the resumption of war with Persia, the other superpower of late antiquity, stretched imperial resources. After much expenditure of blood and treasure, by Justinian's death in 565 a tentative peace had briefly settled. However, the rise of the Avars in the Balkans, the migration of the Lombards into Italy, and above all an even costlier new war with Persia sapped imperial resources and morale. With the Balkans and Italy fragmenting and the eastern front trapped in a costly stalemate, it became ever harder to claim that the Roman Empire was still ever victorious.

Alongside military disaster, the climate literally became darker for the Romans. In the 530s much of the world entered a period of extreme climate instability, most probably as the result of massive volcanic eruptions. Most portentously, in 536 the sun barely shone. This was the beginning of what is called the Late Antique Little Age, with global temperatures plunging and remaining abnormally low for more than a century. While the local impact of the resultant changes is complicated and much debated, on the macro-level it is hard to dispute that this damaged the agricultural productivity of the Roman Empire, inevitably impoverishing society in general and imperial tax receipts.⁵⁶

Worse, it almost certainly was a factor in another, potentially graver, disaster: the advent of the plague. First striking in 541, this would periodically recur for the next two centuries, with the last outbreak in Byzantium striking Constantinople in 746–47. Exactly how much of an impact the plague had is even more disputed territory. However, the double hit of a cooler climate and a recurrent pandemic undoubtedly drove a significant demographic decline. The Roman Empire, dependant on tax payments drawn overwhelmingly from its agrarian base to pay for its standing army, must have been notably weakened by these events, one plausible factor behind the contemporaneous general decline in the empire's military fortunes.

56 For an account that emphasizes the negative impact of climate change on the empire, see Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of Empire* (Princeton: 2017). For a reaction to this and also to the emphasis on the plague, see John Haldon et al., "Plagues, Climate Change and the End of Empire: A Response to Kyle Harper's *The Fate of Rome*," *History Compass* 16 (2018).

Decline became disaster in the 7th century.⁵⁷ A final and devastating round of war with the Persians opened in 602. In 614 Jerusalem fell, and the piece of the True Cross kept there was seized. By 620 the whole of Syria-Palestine and Egypt, the richest and most populous provinces of the empire, had been occupied. In 626 an Avar and Slav host besieged Constantinople, with a Persian army watching on from the Asian side of the Bosphorus. Almost miraculously, the Emperor Heraclius (610–41) gambled Byzantium's reserves of men and money by personally leading a set of daring campaigns that were cast as a form of holy war. These snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. By 630 Byzantium's borders were restored, and Heraclius triumphantly entered Jerusalem with the True Cross returned by the peace treaty with the Persians.

A century of war, plague, and climate change elicited a deep cultural response.⁵⁸ With God so obviously angry, people searched for explanations and for comfort. An increasingly popular model by which to explain matters was found in the Old Testament, with the Byzantines ever more stridently cast as New Israelites being chastised by a wrathful God. In contrast, the elements of classical culture still flourishing in the early years of Justinian increasingly faded away, especially as the cities that fostered them went into crisis. However, the shift towards a greater focus on their Christian identity did not necessarily easily bolster the authority of the institutional Church, still rancorously divided over Christology. Rather, people sought access to the divine in other ways. The cults of saints and relics seems to have intensified, with local populations seeking protection from their local saint. Likewise, the cult of Mary flourished, with the Virgin declared the especial protector of the "God-protected" Constantinople where her most precious relics were housed.⁵⁹ It was to her protection that deliverance from the 626 siege was credited. Particularly notable among the new forms of holiness were the *acheiropoieta*, the miraculous not-made-by-human-hands images that appeared from the middle decades

57 For the 7th century see James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: 2010); John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (rev. ed., Cambridge: 1997); idem, *The Empire that Would Not Die: The Paradox of Eastern Roman Survival* (London: 2016); and Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 226–306.

58 Cameron, "Images of Authority", and "Language of Images"; Mischa Meier, "The Justinianic Plague: The Economic Consequences of the Pandemic in the Eastern Roman Empire and its Cultural and Religious Effects," *Early Medieval Europe* 24 (2016), 267–92.

59 Norman Baynes, "The Supernatural Defenders of Constantinople," in idem, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: 1955), 248–60; Averil Cameron, "The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City Finds its Symbol," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978), 79–108.

of the 6th century. These too were particularly associated with their abilities to defend their cities from attack. Traditionally, this is also the period identified with the rise of a wider cult of Christian images, though as we have noted recent revisionists argue for a distinctly later date.

Emperors both attempted to harness and lead these changes. Already in the later legislation of Justinian one can see the change in ideological focus. The studied classicism of his early legislation disappears. Instead, the rhetoric becomes ever more explicitly Christian, befitting an intensified focus on reforming the Church, monks, and personal morality.⁶⁰ The emperors after Justinian concentrated more on bolstering fading imperial legitimacy by associating themselves with the cults of the cross, Mary, the saints, and relics, including the *acheiropoieta*. Constantinople became the greatest repository of relics in the Christian world, many of which were held in the imperial palace.

However, the attempt to shore up imperial authority through careful manipulation of cult objects did not always work. For instance, in 588 Maurice (582–602) attempted to quell a mutiny among his troops regarding pay by parading before them the Mandylion, the most famous of the miraculous images of Christ. The angry soldiers pelted the holy icon and then destroyed the emperor's own images.⁶¹ As recent scholarship has demonstrated, such scepticism and outright hostility was not a one-off.⁶² Nor was such antipathy only generated by non-religious factors, though the incident is a good reminder that religion was never the only thing that could motivate Byzantines. There was also an intellectual challenge to this new religiosity. The power of cult objects relied on two interlocked beliefs, that a holy person, despite physical distance and even death, could be really present in a material object, and that they could intercede for the believer. However, a theory with deep roots in Greek philosophy and Christian theology was elucidated from the late 6th century on that held that the dead could not interact with the living. Rather, the soul on death entered a form of sleep, in preparation for the end of days. As such, the deceased holy man could neither be really present nor intercede. If any miracles did occur in the presence of a relic or icon, or a believer had a vision of a saint who interacted with them, then it must have been an angel performing

60 Michael Maas, "Roman History and Christian Ideology in Justinianic Reform Legislation," *DOP* 40 (1986), 17–31.

61 Theophylact Simocatta, *History*, ed. Carolus de Boor (Leipzig: 1887), 3.1.8–12.

62 Peter Sarris, Matthew Dal Santo, and Phil Booth (eds.), *An Age of Saints? Power Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity* (Leiden: 2011). See especially the chapter by Dal Santo.

that role.⁶³ Both the faithful seeking solace in the new and intensified modes of holiness and the sceptics doubting their efficacy would have been encouraged by the century of strife that was to come.

These newer discourses did not stop the disputes over Christology, nor imperial attempts to manage them. Indeed, perhaps the most successful short-term move towards unity was launched under Heraclius during his years of triumph. This argued that Christ's two natures were united in a single energy or operation, or "Monoenergism". This won considerable support among the more moderate Miaphysites and was even endorsed by the papacy. However, the patriarch of Jerusalem, traditionally a staunch defender of Chalcedon's two-nature definition of Christ, resisted. In response, in 636 Heraclius issued the *Ekthesis*, in which discussion of operations was banned, and instead a one will or "Monothelete" compromise proposed. Once again, we can see emperors believing they could and indeed should intervene in theological matters. Indeed, Heraclius was acting in a manner akin to Justinian. For his opponents, however, this was criticised as unwonted and unwanted imperial interference in doctrinal matters, a criticism that became ever more vehement as the controversy continued. As we shall see, both attitudes reemerged during iconoclasm. We should also note that Heraclius' brief success in forging some compromise came during an unparalleled moment of authority, when after his stunning victories against the Persians he had vast reserves of prestige and the manifest backing of God.⁶⁴

Heraclius' fleeting moment of triumph was shattered by the arrival of the Arabs. By his death in 641 the whole of Syria and Palestine were lost, and Egypt was on the verge of being conquered. By 651 Persia had been destroyed. In 654 the Roman fleet was sunk, with Constans II (641–68) barely escaping with his life. The Arabs moved on Constantinople as resistance crumbled. Virtually bankrupt, Byzantium seemed to be once more on the brink. What made this challenge even more serious was that the newcomers were preaching their own monotheistic faith. Byzantium had faced a rival superpower in Persia and a rival monotheism in Judaism before, but never both in the same foe.⁶⁵ For all

63 The seminal original article was by Gilbert Dagron, "L'ombre d'un doute: L'hagiographie en question, VIe-XIe siècle," *DOP* 46 (1992), 59–68. See also Dirk Krausmüller, "God or angels as impersonators of saints. A belief and its contexts in the *Refutation* of Eustratius of Constantinople and in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai," *Gouden Hoorn* 6 (1998–1999), 5–16; and Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: 2012).

64 For Monotheletism see Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: 2014).

65 A point forcibly made by Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59–95. For early Islam

that it is undoubtedly true that Islam was still in the process of creation, that it was not the sole motivating force of the Arabs, that Byzantium had a limited understanding of it, and were more interested in themselves than their opponents; inevitably, the existence of a rival monotheistic superpower that had won victories on a scale and at a speed hitherto unknown in history and which was actively trying to conquer Byzantium made the search for why God was punishing his Chosen People even more pressing. No wonder that Constans, in the manner of an Old Testament king, put aside his imperial robes, donned sackcloth, sat on ashes, and led his people in fasting and prayer.⁶⁶

God apparently listened, for a storm wrecked the Arab fleet. Soon the Caliphate descended into acrimonious bloodshed in the first Islamic civil war. Byzantium was granted a precious breathing space for reform. What precisely happened is much disputed and too complicated to discuss here, but it is clear that he reorganised the imperial army now barracked across Anatolia.⁶⁷ What matters here, is that somehow Byzantium avoided bankruptcy and managed to supply an army from a much smaller economic base. One result of this is that there is a notable increase in the resistance of Byzantine troops from this point on, suggesting the interests of the soldiery were sufficiently aligned with those of the state to continue the fight. Moreover, Byzantium became a distinctly more militarized society. The army had always been a vital political constituency, but in an era of constant war, with the soldiery consuming the vast proportion of imperial revenue, and with it firmly embedded in the society and economies of the provinces, it was more important than ever. Constans' other main achievement was the construction of a new fleet. In part this was financed by extracting resources from the relatively unscathed regions of the west, with Constans even moving his court to Sicily in 663 to aid in this. Understandably, this caused considerable dissent.

This was made worse by the divisions over Monotheletism. In 648 Constans issued the *Typos* that banned all debate on the subject. This was not enough for its most zealous opponents, led by a refugee Palestinian monk named Maximus the Confessor. Having previously organised synods in Africa that had rejected Monotheletism, in 649 he persuaded Pope Martin I to hold the Lateran Council that condemned both the *Ekthesis* and the *Typos*. This was a

and the Arab conquests see Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*; Sarris, *Empires of Faith*; Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* (London: 2010); and Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path* (Oxford: 2015).

66 Pseudo-Sebeos, *Armenian History*, ed. G.V. Abgaryan (Yerevan: 1979), 50.

67 Compare Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 286–92 with Haldon, *The Empire that Would Not Die*, 37–41, 249–82.

direct challenge to imperial authority, which Maximus stridently denied had any role in these matters. Indeed, Maximus argued that it was imperial support for Monotheletism that had led to the empire's current dire straits. In 653 both Martin and Maximus were arrested and taken for trial in Constantinople on treason charges. Convicted, both would die in exile, Maximus after mutilation. In the orthodox empire religious dissent could easily merge into the political.

Constans II's aggressive policies were all predicated on the idea that he could reenact the success of Heraclius and reconquer the provinces lost to the Arabs. Unfortunately for him, the Islamic civil war ended in 661 and once more Byzantium came under intense pressure. The increasingly unpopular Constans was assassinated in 668. The new emperor, Constantine IV (668–85), was immediately faced by yet another attempt to take Constantinople, with the city blockaded by sea. However, the reconstructed imperial fleet, now armed with the famous Greek Fire, proved its worth and repulsed the attack. The war with the Arabs began to swing dramatically in Byzantium's favour. By the end of the 670s it was the Caliphate that was forced to pay tribute in exchange for a truce, and which was about to descend into an even bloodier and more protracted second civil war.⁶⁸

To secure the continued support of heaven, so obviously manifest in these victories, and to rebuild bruised relations with the papacy and the western provinces, in 680–81 Constantine IV convened the sixth ecumenical council. This formally repudiated Monotheletism. It also permitted Constantine to associate himself with the legacy of Constantine I and Justinian. Moreover, Constantine was an active participant in proceedings, and the rhetoric of the council affirmed his authority as appointed by Christ, and that it was his duty to uphold orthodoxy. From this would flow victory and prosperity.

However, even during proceedings that claim was tested. For a new enemy in the form of the Bulgars emerged along the southern bank of the Danube. Constantine failed to repulse them from this nominally imperial territory dangerously close to Constantinople. From here on, the presence of the Bulgars was yet another complication for Byzantium to manage.

Still, when Justinian II (685–95; 705–11) inherited the throne in 685 Byzantium was in a stronger position than it had been for some time. Soon Justinian had pressured the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik (685–705), in the middle of the civil war, to pay a truly swingeing tribute. Successful campaigns were launched extending imperial authority in Transcaucasia and the Balkans. Relations with the pope were excellent, and the western provinces secure. All

68 Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses*, 488–95; Sarris, *Empires of Faith*, 292–95.

that was needed for the launch of the glorious war of reconquest to restore the empire of Justinian I was to doubly make sure of divine support.

With the doctrinal issue settled, Justinian decided to emulate his namesake by using law to morally reform his people. This time, however, he decided to use canon law as his tool, and in 691/92 convened a self-proclaimed ecumenical council to issue the necessary canons.⁶⁹ This met in a domed chamber of the imperial palace called Trullo, and so is often called the Council in Trullo. Its other name is the Quinisext Council, or “fifth-sixth” council, as its declared purpose was to provide the canons that had not been issued at those ecumenical councils. In this it revealed its novelty. Heretofore ecumenical councils had been held to deal with fundamental doctrinal issues, and only then did they on occasion legislate on other matters. By making the issuing of canons its *raison d’être* Quinisext changed the focus from matters of orthodoxy to orthopraxy, “correct conduct”. In its 102 canons, Quinisext regulated a whole host of issues, not just the conduct of clerics and monks but of ordinary Christians too. Interestingly for our purposes, this reforming drive included the first canons that regulated aspects of Christian art. Justinian enmeshed these canons in a sweeping ideology that set the Christian empire within a cosmological struggle, in which he as the terrestrial mirror of Christ would defeat the encroaching foe through the moral reformation of Church and people. This strident Christocentric monarchy was also made visible in Justinian’s new coinage, in which for the first time Christ was depicted, with the imperial portrait relegated to the back.⁷⁰ This was not a lowly position. For Christ and emperor had become literally two sides of the same coin.

Justinian II’s grandiose claims were resisted by the papacy. More significantly, when put to the ultimate test of battle, the assertion of divine favour was found wanting. Abd al-Malik had emerged victorious from the civil war and was soon reinforcing his own position by attacking Byzantium. Justinian’s armies were defeated, and he himself was overthrown in 695, though in an act of mercy the new emperor Leontios (695–98) spared Justinian’s life and merely slit his nose and tongue. Leontios however could not stem the Arab advance, with North Africa falling for the final time in 698. The returning Byzantine force mutinied and besieged Constantinople, eventually installing

69 *Quinisext Council*, ed. Heinz Ohme, *ACO* 2.2.4 (Berlin: 2013). For an analysis see Mike Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850* (Oxford: 2015), 37–80.

70 James Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* (New York: 1959); Mike Humphreys, “A War of Images? Justinian II’s Coinage Reform and the Caliphate,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 173 (2013), 229–44.

their leader Tiberius III Apsimar (698–705) as emperor. Then in an amazing turn of events, Justinian II retook the throne backed by the Bulgars. Despite brining in a new bust of Christ on his coins, and in 710 reaching an accord with the papacy, Justinian was confronted with rebellions and continued pressure from the Caliphate. In 711 Justinian was overthrown and executed by Philippicus Bardanes (711–13). Philippicus even reinstituted Monotheletism in a bid to win back divine favour. Still the Arabs kept advancing, and in 713 the soldiers of the *Opsikion*, the most significant army command, mutinied. The new emperor, Anastasius II (713–15), seeing the build-up of Arab forces, strengthened Constantinople's defences and the fleet. This did not stop him in turn being overthrown, again by the *Opsikion*, who installed Theodosius III (715–17). When he also was deposed in 717 Byzantium had suffered seven transfers of imperial power in 22 years. All the while territory was lost and the Arab threat intensified.

In ca. 690 Byzantium, for all its real decline and weaknesses, was still a superpower straddling the Mediterranean contending for mastery of the Near East with a Caliphate only just emerging from a terrible civil war. It could still pretend that Islam was a temporary chastisement sent by God to punish the Chosen People for their sins, and that once those sins had been identified and crushed the old world would return. Over the previous century, despite the ravages of plague and continual warfare that had undeniably shrunk and impoverished the empire, and which at several moments threatened the empire's very survival, Byzantium had endured. It had adapted its already sophisticated and powerful ideological and organizational systems sufficiently enough that it could continuously raise men and money for the fight. Despite the losses and the demands made by the imperial government, which did generate considerable resistance, the centre largely held.⁷¹

However, after 695 the empire began to spiral out of control. In contrast, the Caliphate was triumphant and was expressing its Islamic identity ever more forthrightly.⁷² No more could Islam be dismissed as temporary, and the search for what had gone wrong for the Chosen People became more desperate. Finally, in 717 a vast Arab army advanced on Constantinople to deliver the decisive blow.

71 For a focus on the remarkable success and adaptability of the empire in the face of these pressures, see Haldon, *The Empire that Would Not Die*.

72 Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 194–224; Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 138–69.

2.3 *The Isaurian Recovery*

At this critical juncture, Leo III the general (*strategos*) of the *Anatolikon* army, seized the throne. Through a mixture of good luck, Leo's personal leadership, the defences of Constantinople, and an alliance with the Bulgars that harried the Arabs' supply lines, Byzantium survived the siege of 717–18. More than that, the Arabs lost vast numbers of men and materiel. Inevitably it would take time to recover, time that allowed Leo to solidify his position.

To that end, Leo's strongest card was this victory. It spectacularly validated both his martial credentials and his standing with God, especially to the army. It was thanks to his support and position in the army that he had gained the throne, and it remained the bedrock of his powerbase. To secure its continued loyalty he appointed dependable allies to the most important posts. In particular, his accession had been dependant on an alliance with Artabasdos, the general of the *Armeniakon* theme. This alliance was sealed by a marriage with Leo's daughter Anna. Leo further rewarded Artabasdos with the highly prestigious office of *Kouropalates*, the official in charge of managing the imperial palace. Most significantly he was made commander of the *Opsikion* army. Not only was this one of the largest commands, it was also responsible for the defence of Constantinople, and had repeatedly used its position to influence affairs in the capital. With this move and the installation of other loyalists Leo ensured his control of the key levers of the Byzantine state and forestalled the successful emergence of another usurper.

The birth of Constantine V in 718 further strengthened Leo's position. In 720 Leo crowned the infant co-emperor, proclaiming the fact on his coins and seals. While the first depictions of Constantine on his father's gold and bronze coins retained a modicum of portraiture, soon father and son were almost identical.⁷³ The imperial image was increasingly a dynastic one. Constantine's elevation also offered the perfect occasion to introduce a new denomination, the silver *miliaresion*.⁷⁴ Strikingly aniconic it clearly takes inspiration from Islamic *dirhams*. However, it stridently asserts a martial Christianity by presenting a cross surrounded by the legend "Jesus Christ Conquers." Leo thus associated himself with the cross and the memory of Constantine I. This was neither the first nor last time the Isaurians utilised the cross.⁷⁵ It would become the recurring *leitmotif* of their iconography and fundamental to their ideology. Not only was it resolutely Christian, it was a symbol that since the time of Constantine I

73 *DOC* 3.1, 229–30, 241–46.

74 *DOC* 3.1, 227, 231–2, 251–53.

75 For the Isaurians and the cross, see John Moorhead, "Iconoclasm, the Cross and the Imperial Image," *Byzantion* 55 (1985), 165–79.

was associated with the emperor and imperial victory, an association that had only deepened with Heraclius' rescue of the True Cross from the Persians, with a portion of the relic kept in the imperial palace. There was no better symbol for the Christian empire that had just survived an attempted conquest by a rival monotheism that denied the divinity and resurrection of Christ, and did so explicitly on its own coinage.

This militant Christianity led by the Isaurian dynasty was couched in a strident Old Testament-inspired rhetoric. While this can be seen from the outset of Leo's reign, the best evidence comes from its final year. For in 741 Leo and Constantine published the *Ecloga*.⁷⁶ In this concise handbook of Byzantine law, a landmark in Byzantine legal history, one can find no notion of the Byzantines being Roman. Rather they were solely described as Christians. Moreover, they were Christians caught in a bitter fight with non-Christians. The only way to secure peace and prosperity was to live according to the law of God, Roman law being reimagined as the continuation of that of Moses. Indeed, the Isaurians were Moses and Solomon reborn, appointed by God to reform the elect through the application of pious legislation.

The *Ecloga* was more than simply a piece of rhetoric. Rather, it had a clear practical purpose, intended to aid the application of justice throughout the empire. As such it represents one part of a strategy to reimpose imperial authority throughout the empire and rebuild the Byzantine state to be better suited to its altered circumstances. Those areas of the empire more sheltered from attack were squeezed for more resources. This raised both money and resentment, resulting in several rebellions, most obviously in Italy, which was in the middle of a tax revolt led by the region's major landowner, the pope, before any action of Leo regarding icons was taken. A more significant fiscal reorganisation was undertaken ca. 730. Older ad hoc measures were phased out. Instead more specialised officials appeared separately tasked with taxing trade, supplying the armies, and collecting the land and hearth taxes. These were grouped into districts that directly mirrored the army commands, the better to manage their needs and a reflection of the increased militarization of Byzantine life.⁷⁷

When not reforming the state and imperial ideology, Leo was actively leading troops. The breathing space provided by the victory in 717–18 was brief, with Caliph Hisham (724–43) notably renewing the number and intensity

76 *Ecloga*, ed. Ludwig Burgmann (Frankfurt: 1983); trans. Mike Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era: The Ecloga and its Appendices* (Liverpool: 2017). For its significance, see Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology*, 81–129.

77 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 695–705.

of Arab attacks. In 727 an Arab army even penetrated as far as Nicaea, deep within imperial territory. However, the combination of Leo's reforms and his personal leadership stiffened resistance. Leo also sealed an anti-caliphal alliance with the dominant power in the western steppe, the Khazars, by arranging a betrothal between Constantine and the daughter of the Khagan. All these steps and others worked, and increasingly Arab raids were contained. Finally, in 740 Leo and Constantine personally lead a Byzantine army that won a major battle at Akroinon, inflicting up to 20,000 casualties. Any lingering hopes that the Arabs might have had about a conquest dissipated forever. Indeed, the defeat along with a major rebellion of the Berbers in North Africa shook the foundations of the Umayyad Caliphate, directly leading to its overthrow in 750 by the Abbasids.⁷⁸

Despite our very patchy and usually very hostile sources, it is evident that Leo III was one of the most successful and significant rulers in Byzantine history. Whatever moves he took regarding icons must be seen within this context. We should also note here that the controversy first emerged in a particular context, during the mid-720s when God seemed once again to be turning against Byzantium, and that after the institution of iconoclasm, in whatever form that took, the empire gradually regained ground.

Constantine V inherited a distinctly stronger state and would do much to further his father's legacy. However, his first problem was directly caused by one of Leo's earliest and most important moves. For soon after Leo's death in 741 Artabasdos seized Constantinople and almost captured Constantine in a well-supported coup. Constantine fled to his father's old command of the *Anatolikon* and Byzantium descended into a civil war that was much longer and bloodier than anything seen during the infighting of 695–717. It was to Byzantium's great fortune that the Caliphate could not intervene, and by 743 Constantine had emerged victorious.

Having had his authority as Leo III's heir so vehemently challenged, it is unsurprising that Constantine sought to buttress his legitimacy by emphasizing his link to his popular father. Hence, in an unprecedented move he kept the portrait of the deceased Leo on his coins.⁷⁹ Even after the birth of his first son, not coincidentally called Leo, the portrait of Leo III was retained if relegated to the reverse, with the obverse occupied by busts of Constantine and Leo IV. Never before had dynasty been such an important part of imperial numismatic representation. The policy reached its pinnacle under the future Constantine

78 Hoyland, *In God's Path*, 170–206.

79 *DOC* 3.1, 291–4, 299–301.

VI, who on the reverse of his coins had identical portraits of his father Leo IV, grandfather Constantine V, and great-grandfather Leo III. This survived the condemnation of iconoclasm in 787 and was only abandoned in 792 or 793 as a result of the factional squabbling between Constantine VI and his mother Irene.⁸⁰ Notably, none of the changes can be linked to iconoclasm. Constantine V was also probably the emperor who constructed the *Porphyra*, the porphyry-clad chamber in the imperial palace in which future emperors would be born, hence becoming *Porphyrogennetos*, “born in the purple”.⁸¹ Constantine continued to emphasise dynasty late into his reign, in the 760s elevating two other sons to the rank of *Caesar*, and another two to *Nobilissimus*.⁸²

Constantine also continued the policy of promoting the cross, most obviously seen in the sumptuous apse mosaic of the restored Hagia Eirene. This was just one of many building projects, particularly in Constantinople, associated with Constantine. Probably this includes construction of the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos in the imperial palace, first mentioned in 769.⁸³ Close to the throne room, this would hold the palace’s relic collection including the True Cross. Constantine also renovated the dilapidated aqueduct of Valens. Not only did this restore an important amenity, aiding in the sustained revival of Constantinople that began in this period. It also carried a polyvalent message. Constantine was restoring a faded imperial service long redolent with Roman civilisation. More notably, contemporary stories gave it a religious meaning, associating the renovation with Constantine slaying a dragon.⁸⁴ This surely represents Constantine slaying the dragon of heresy and sin to restore the waters of baptism.

Of course, the enforcement of orthodoxy is most prominently seen in Constantine’s iconoclast policies, discussed elsewhere. What we should note here is that Constantine recast the iconoclast critique as one of heresy, whereas previously it had been focused on the issue of idolatry. He did so by embedding iconoclasm within established Christological arguments. Thereby, he made

80 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 352–54.

81 Judith Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London: 2001), 65.

82 Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: 2003), 32.

83 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1883–85), 444; trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*, with the assistance of Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford: 1997).

84 Constantin Zuckerman, “The Reign of Constantine V in the Miracles of St Theodore the Recruit (BHG 1764),” *REB* 46 (1988), 191–210; Marie-France Auzépy, “Constantine, Théodore et le dragon,” in Katerina Nikolaou (ed.), *Toleration and Repression in the Middle Ages* (Athens: 2002), 87–96.

iconoclasm about the defence of orthodoxy, meaning that, like his namesake Constantine I, he could convene an ecumenical council, associating himself with the line of great Christian emperors. Like Justinian, he engaged directly in the debate. One might also see emulation of Justinian in his desire, much debated in scholarship and distorted by hostile sources, to reform abuses in monasticism and the cult of relics.⁸⁵

It is also highly probable that Constantine continued the legislative work of the *Ecloga*, issued in both his and Leo III's name. Among the texts appended to this work include an anthology of Justinianic law on heresy, reinforcing the connection with Justinian and his image as a fighter of heresy. Another was a selection from the Laws of Moses that emphasized the idea that the emperor was inspired by the model of the Old Testament lawgiver to reform the Chosen People. Yet another was a compilation of military law designed to raise standards, moral and martial, among the soldiers.⁸⁶

This last points to the structural reforms undertaken by Constantine. Notably the over-powerful *Opsikion* was broken into three successor commands, one of which was turned into a supply and logistics corps. At a stroke, the most politically dangerous provincial army was neutralized, and a more professional supply system created. Furthermore, Constantine reconstituted old palace guard units into an elite standing army stationed in the capital. These units, called *tagmata*, both improved the emperor's personal security and created an elite strike force that could be used either to impose the imperial will or to lead campaigns.⁸⁷

Taking advantage of the decline of the Umayyad Caliphate and then the transfer of the centre of caliphal power to Iraq, Constantine launched raids into the Caliphate. Continuing throughout his reign, these brought glory and booty, but also served a deliberate policy. A no-man's land denuded of people, resources, and the general infrastructure needed to support large-scale operations was created along the eastern frontier. Constantine also continued the process, generations in the making by this point, of fortifying Anatolia, creating a network of fortresses, watchtowers, and refuges. These moves enhanced the difficult natural geography of eastern Anatolia to make Islamic raids on Byzantine territory harder and less lucrative. The result was a general equilibrium of power along the eastern frontier, with raiding endemic but little attempt by either side at permanent territorial conquest. Despite temporary

85 For Constantine v and his policies towards monks and relics see Chapter 10 of this volume.

86 Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology*, 131–79.

87 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 740–43.

fluctuations in the balance of power one way or the other, usually driven by events in the Caliphate, the general equilibrium would survive until the 10th century when Byzantium began to expand against the then fractured Muslim world.⁸⁸

Many of those taken from the eastern frontier were settled in the depopulated Balkans. Bit by bit Byzantine authority was extended out from the coastal enclaves that had survived the collapse of imperial power in the 7th century. However, the repopulation and fortification of Thrace led from the late 750s to a long confrontation with the Bulgars. Repeatedly Constantine launched major campaigns into Bulgar territory, that despite the odd failure were generally marked by success. This won him prestige and the intense loyalty of his troops, especially the *tagmata*.⁸⁹

In the West, Constantine was much less successful. In 751 Ravenna finally fell to the Lombards. Henceforth imperial power was largely confined to Sicily and Calabria. As a result, Byzantium could neither intimidate nor help the papacy. Instead, Rome forged an alliance with the Franks, who by 774 had become the dominant power in Italy. While Constantine maintained largely good relations with the Franks, the emergence of the most powerful western empire since the 5th century inevitably complicated Byzantium's policies in Italy and the Balkans. Moreover, the alliance of the Franks with an increasingly secure and prosperous papacy meant that the latter had even less incentive than before to bow to Constantinople in religious matters.

When Constantine v died in 775, he bequeathed a stable empire and strengthened state. That stability combined with the final ending of the plague, the last outbreak of which to hit Byzantium came in 746–47, underpinned a returning prosperity.⁹⁰ In turn, greater prosperity led to an upturn in monastic endowments and a resultant uptick in literary production.⁹¹ Sadly for Constantine v, the cultural revival whose roots lie in his and his father's reigns, worked against his memory. For its first fruits, or at least those that survive, came after the "restoration" of icons in 787, and a main focus of the renewal of literary production during the Iconophile Intermission was to blacken the reputation of the iconoclasts. Despite this, it is evident that Constantine v, like his

88 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 166–67.

89 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 164–66.

90 Angeliki Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge: 2007), 43–89; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 453–530.

91 Peter Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, ca. 350–850* (Cambridge: 2007), 257–440.

father, was one of the most successful, influential, and long-ruling emperors in Byzantine history.

2.4 *The Return of Instability*

It is something of a compliment to Constantine's success, that at the accession of Leo IV in 775 the only real threat came from within the dynasty, stemming from the fact that Constantine had been far too prolific in producing sons. However, by 776 Leo had successfully made his own son Constantine VI, born in 770, his co-emperor, and extracted oaths of loyalty to both of them from a broad range of vested interests. A plot involving his half-brother Nikephoros was quashed, with Nikephoros being stripped of his rank as *Caesar*. After this, Leo's reign proceeded along largely similar lines to that of his father.

The problem of Constantine V's sons returned in 780 with the sudden death of Leo IV. The minority of Constantine VI required a regency, and as was usual for Byzantium his mother Irene took the role. However, some members of the imperial establishment, dominated by the army, clearly thought the adult sons of Constantine V were a preferable alternative to a minor and his mother, who thanks to age and gender could not fill the role of warlord so adeptly taken by Leo III and Constantine V. A plot seeking to make Nikephoros emperor was exposed and a large number of leading officials were scourged, shaved, and exiled. Nikephoros and his brothers were forced to become priests and publicly administered communion, thereby removing them from the line of succession.⁹² However, they and their potential supporters remained a threat. Throughout her regency and into her own sole reign, from 797 to 802, Irene was always wary about relying too heavily on traditional military commanders. Instead, she entrusted several campaigns to eunuchs who could be more trusted.⁹³

It was to Irene and Constantine VI's notable disadvantage that the Abbasid Caliphate, at the zenith of its power, had begun from ca. 780 to campaign aggressively against Byzantium.⁹⁴ The aim was not to conquer large stretches of territory, let alone destroy the whole of Byzantium, but to gain prestige for the caliphs by winning victories and taking tribute from the Caliphate's premier rival. As such these attacks were essentially raids that did little to undermine

92 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 454.

93 For an in-depth narrative history of this period, see Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford: 1988).

94 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 252–55. For the Abbasids and the state of the Muslim World, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (3rd ed., London: 2015), chapters 5 and 6.

the fundamental integrity of the empire. However, they certainly did reduce the prestige and legitimacy of the ruling emperors. In particular, embarrassing defeats were regularly inflicted in the period after the council of Nicaea in 787. The two were connected, as having faced resistance from the *tagmata* regarding her proposed change of religious policy, Irene cashiered these elite soldiers.⁹⁵ At first defeats in the east were offset somewhat by continued gains in the Balkans. However, while in the south gains continued, the resistance of the Bulgars strengthened from the 790s.⁹⁶

Irene attempted to bolster her and her son through improved relations with the papacy and the Franks. Notably, she arranged a betrothal between Constantine and one of Charlemagne's daughters. However, despite the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 being supported by Pope Hadrian I there were still considerable strains in the relationship between Old and New Rome. As for the Franks, Nicaea coincided with and accelerated a souring of relations including the breaking of the betrothal.⁹⁷

The 790s also witnessed bitter infighting between the factions around Irene and Constantine VI, as the regent continued her attempts to exercise real power despite Constantine's adulthood.⁹⁸ In 792 yet another attempt to make Nikephoros emperor failed. Nikephoros was blinded, his brothers had their tongues slit, and all were imprisoned in a monastery. This did not stop the discontent. Constantine's position was undermined not only by his martial failures, but also his marital ones. In 795 Constantine forced his first wife into a convent and married his mistress. This was an act of adultery, *moicheia* in Greek, and hence the considerable opposition this caused is called the Moechian Controversy. Patriarch Tarasios did not officiate at the wedding, but neither did he speak against it. Opposition was led by Plato, an influential ascetic and abbot the Sakkoudion monastery, and his nephew Theodore the Studite. Despite all of them being leading iconophiles, Plato and Theodore denounced Tarasios for his passivity and broke communion with him. The affair would continue to divide the Byzantine Church into the early 9th century.⁹⁹

In 797 Irene deposed and blinded her unpopular son. Thus, began the first reign by an empress in her own right. Although she was by marriage an Isaurian, the removal of her son and the successive punishments of her brothers-in-law destroyed the male line. From the outset, the ageing empress was undermined

95 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 462.

96 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 253–56.

97 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 256–60.

98 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 286–91.

99 Alexander, *Nikephoros*, 82–101.

by having no heir. Defeats continued. Meanwhile her leading eunuch advisors squabbled among themselves. Irene attempted to buy support by granting gifts and tax concessions, which won her some popularity but denuded the treasury. However, it was not enough, and in 802 Irene was overthrown and replaced with her finance minister, Nikephoros I (802–11).¹⁰⁰

In stark contrast to the problems in Constantinople, Charlemagne was crowned emperor in Rome on Christmas Day 800. The existence of another Christian Roman empire thereafter complicated imperial-Frankish relations and was a challenge to imperial ideology. Eventually in 812 imperial envoys recognised Charlemagne as an emperor, though not as the emperor of the Romans. The Byzantines hammered home the point on their coins. Previously the silver *miliaresion* only bore the title *Basileus*, “emperor”. From this point onwards this was expanded to “emperor of the Romans”.¹⁰¹ This was merely the start of a renewed emphasis on the Roman identity that can be discerned over the course of the 9th and 10th centuries.¹⁰² This would go hand-in-hand with wrangling between the iconophiles and iconoclasts over who best maintained the orthodox past of the late antique Christian Roman emperors, which would in turn resuscitate interest in the Roman past especially its late antique phase.

Nikephoros I receives almost as much opprobrium in our sources as the iconoclasts, a reminder that even to the ardent iconophiles, who wrote most of our sources, iconoclasm was not the only issue.¹⁰³ In part this hostility was because Nikephoros became embroiled in the Moechian Controversy. Largely though it was due to Nikephoros’ diligence in reversing Irene’s fiscal prolificacy, and efficiently collecting taxes. It is also very plausible that he reformed part of the fiscal administration and significantly overhauled the remuneration and supply of the soldiery, though these reforms probably were a process that continued into the 830s.¹⁰⁴ Nikephoros’ unpopularity led to several rebellions and coup attempts. In foreign and military affairs, the pattern continued of difficulties on the eastern front being partially offset by gains in the Balkans. However, the great disaster that ended his reign occurred against the Bulgars. For in 811 while on campaign Nikephoros was killed, his heir mortally wounded, and the army routed. The unfortunate Nikephoros had his skull turned into a drinking

100 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 291–94.

101 *DOC* 3.1, 364–67.

102 Ihor Ševčenko, “The Search for the Past around the Year 800,” *DOP* 46 (1992), 279–93; Paul Magdalino, “The Distance of the Past in Early Medieval Byzantium (VIIth–Xth Centuries),” *SSCIS* 46 (1999), 115–46.

103 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 357–61.

104 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 709–722, 744–55.

cup by the victorious Bulgar Khagan Krum, who was soon raiding up to the vicinity of Constantinople.¹⁰⁵ The new emperor, Michael I (811–13), could do little to re-establish order. There was even a plot to place the now blinded sons of Constantine V on the throne. Others rushed to the tomb of Constantine to beg him to arise to save the state from the Bulgars.¹⁰⁶

It was in this context of panic and a desire for a return to the glory days of Constantine V that Leo V seized the throne in 813, with Michael I allowed to retire to a monastery.¹⁰⁷ It was soon clear that Leo would seek to buttress his legitimacy by mirroring his reign on that of Leo III. He even renamed his son Constantine, so that once more a Leo and Constantine ruled as emperors. Most famously, in 815 he reembraced iconoclasm. This was followed by a few victories against both the Arabs and Bulgars that could have been taken as manifesting divine approval. Certainly, Leo V was fortunate that Krum's death in 814 precipitated Bulgar infighting, allowing for a new frontier to be established. Many of the gains of the past half-century were lost, but not all. Further south in the Balkans, Byzantium continued to gradually expand its control. Leo was also the beneficiary of a civil war and its aftermath in the Caliphate that distracted caliphal forces from 809 to the late 820s.

Despite his successes, Leo was assassinated by the supporters of one of his generals, Michael II (820–29). His coup started a civil war with another of Leo's generals, Thomas the Slav. Supported by most of the Anatolian armies, Thomas besieged Constantinople between 821 and 823. Thanks in part to intervention by the Bulgars, Michael eventually defeated Thomas. While the empire under Michael II did not have to face significant pressure from forces directly under the command of the Abbasid Caliph, the fracturing of the Islamic world at this time created several new Muslim centres and a host of freebooters that caused Byzantium significant trouble. Notably Crete was captured in the 820s by Muslim raiders, and turned into a pirate base that remained a problem until its reconquest in 961. At the same time, Sicily was invaded from North Africa, with much of the island quickly falling out of Byzantine control during the 830s. Despite these failures, the core territories and armies of the empire remained intact and continued their slow economic revival.¹⁰⁸

Theophilos on his accession in 829 immediately sought to distance himself from his father by punishing those associated with the assassination of Leo V. This helped to establish a budding reputation for justice. Tutored by the

105 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 491.

106 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 501.

107 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 366–85.

108 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 386–92.

learned iconoclast John the Grammarian, whom in 837 he made patriarch, he was both an ardent iconoclast and a lover of learning. His court was probably the most culturally renowned since the 6th century. Theophilos was also an active builder, including constructing a new palace influenced by the style of the Abbasid court. Indeed, contact with the Abbasids was regular, and involved a competition in expensive well-crafted gifts and intellectual achievements, as well as military tussles. An example of this competitive court culture and the mechanical expertise that Theophilos could call on can be found in the automata that adorned his court, including the so-called throne of Solomon surrounded by golden lions that could roar and birds that could sing.¹⁰⁹

The cultural, architectural, and artisanal achievements of Theophilos' court reflect the continuing upswing in the Byzantine economy, and the continued ability of the tax system to cycle a significant proportion of that wealth through the emperor's hands. Another sign of returning prosperity, and a stimulant for it, was a very significant upswing in the amount of bronze coinage in circulation. For the first time since the mid-7th century a small-change coinage was in widespread and significant use across the empire, and not just in the core zones of the empire. This in turn probably reflects a desire to increase the proportion of tax raised in coin, and several changes to the fiscal administration took place under Theophilos.¹¹⁰

In foreign and military affairs, Theophilos' record was mixed. Overall, in the Balkans the gradual increase in imperial authority continued. In the west, Sicily slipped further and decisively from imperial control. The main focus of activity was on the eastern front. Here Theophilos suffered from the fact that the Caliphate had stabilised somewhat by ca. 830, and the attention of the competent and aggressively martial al-Ma'mun (813–33) and al-Mu'tasim (833–42) had turned to Byzantium. On occasion Theophilos won some notable victories. However, when the Caliphate was undistracted it could still devote considerably more resources to the field than Byzantium, at least temporarily. During Theophilos' reign this superiority was demonstrated several times, most famously with the sack of Amorion in 838. Although arguably magnified by iconophiles seeking to find definitive proof that God was not on the side of the iconoclasts, nevertheless the sacking of the strategically vital capital of the *Anatolikon* and birthplace of the ruling dynasty was a major prestige blow. However, thanks to the fact that the Caliphate quickly became entangled

109 Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: 2000), 115.

110 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 722.

elsewhere, no long-term harm was inflicted save to the military reputation of Theophilos and the idea that iconoclasm could guarantee victory.¹¹¹

Theophilos died in 842, leaving his infant son Michael III (842–67) on the throne with his widow Theodora as regent. In an obscure process, a year later the iconoclast patriarch John the Grammarian was deposed and replaced by the iconophile Methodios, and icons were once and for all proclaimed as a legitimate and necessary element of Orthodox worship. Whatever the other reasons, it is evident that the failure of the reigns of Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilos to reach the heights of Leo III and Constantine V was one factor undermining the appeal of iconoclasm. Likewise, the fact that Byzantium post-843 entered a period of relative political, cultural, and economic prosperity validated the Triumph of Orthodoxy. At the same time, it is clear that, like the preceding reigns of the iconophiles, much happened during their reigns that had little or nothing to do with the image question. Despite the defeats and political upheaval, the core of the Byzantine Empire came through both the Iconophile Intermission and Second Iconoclasm not only unscathed but increasingly prosperous. This built on the successes of the Isaurians, though notable advances in the power and efficacy of the Byzantine state were achieved by Nikephoros I and Theophilos.

If one could remove iconoclasm from the tapestry of Byzantine history, the period often called the “Iconoclast Era” would stand out for both the extent of the challenges the empire faced and its remarkable ability to adapt to meet them. That, of course, is impossible, and it would be just as distorting as seeing the whole period solely through the lens of iconoclasm. For the controversy both mattered hugely and is, despite all the difficulties associated with it, one of the best and most interesting ways to analyse the period. Therefore, with the wider context hopefully set, let us now turn to iconoclasm and its roots.

3 Byzantine Iconoclasm

3.1 *Images, Idols, and Iconoclasm before Byzantine Iconoclasm*

Iconoclasm in Byzantium was a complex, multifaceted, and evolving phenomenon. Hence it is no surprise that it had deep and complicated roots, indeed far too many and intricate to give a full account in this volume. Rather, in two chapters, Robin Jensen and Benjamin Anderson examine what could be called

111 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 404–11.

the principal rootstock: how Christians in the Roman Empire thought about and created religious art in the centuries preceding the “Iconoclast Era”.

However, before we delve into that, we must first set the scene. Christianity evolved out of another religion, Judaism, and did so in a particular context, the Roman Empire, an environment in which it would continue to evolve. It had a complicated relationship with both, and both had a rich discourse of ideas and practices concerning imagery in general, and religious figural imagery in particular. Let us begin by examining the text, or more precisely texts, which more than any other shaped Christian views before, during, and after iconoclasm, namely the Bible.

3.1.1 The Biblical Legacy

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The Second Commandment, Exodus 20:4-6

If one can say that Byzantine iconoclasm had any single beginning it is to be found in the second of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai.¹¹² While the various books of the Hebrew Bible are liberally littered with numerous laws that collectively regulated and defined the Israelites as God’s Chosen People, the Ten Commandments or Decalogue have a uniquely significant prominence. They were the apex and foundation of the Law given to Moses, which was the basis of the covenant between God and his Chosen People. And directly flowing on from the first commandment, “I am the Lord your God ... you shall have no other gods before me” is the injunction to neither make, venerate, or worship idols, the last two terms rendered as *proskynesis* and *latreia* in the *Septuagint* Greek version of the Old Testament used by the Byzantines, terms that will recur repeatedly in the Byzantine debate.

Nor is the Second Commandment the end of the matter. Rather, the explicit anti-idolatry message is repeated throughout the Hebrew Bible, accepted into Christianity as the Old Testament.¹¹³ On occasion, there are direct commands

¹¹² Exodus 20:1-21, repeated in Deuteronomy 5:1-21.

¹¹³ E.g. Exodus 20:23; Exodus 34:17; Leviticus 26:1.

to destroy idols. For instance, God instructed the Israelites not only to “utterly destroy” the current inhabitants of the Promised Land, but also to “break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.”¹¹⁴ The Israelites are warned against imitating the idolatrous practices of other people, which are often presented as a snare, contagion, or corruption designed to lead the Chosen People away from their God.¹¹⁵ This seduction of the people from worship of the true God meant that idolatry was conceived as a form of adultery, and is frequently associated with sexual immorality.¹¹⁶ Whereas idolatry is condemned as a terrible sin, idols themselves are mocked as worthless, man-made fabrications, devoid of life and power.¹¹⁷ In contrast, the Old Testament Creator God is uncreated and formless, and so cannot be represented by an idol.¹¹⁸ Rather than looking to idols, the Israelites were supposed to obey the Law. Hence the symbolic heart of the new religion was not a cult statue but the Ark of the Covenant containing the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written.¹¹⁹

The Hebrew Bible is also clear on the importance of adhering to divine law in general, and the avoidance of idolatry in particular. God promises bounteous crops, peace, and military victory for faithful adherents. Transgressors will be punished with environmental disaster, plague, and defeat.¹²⁰ Much of the succeeding history recorded in the Old Testament is an account of God fulfilling his promises of reward and punishment. The Chosen People repeatedly fall short of the Law before being (temporarily) brought back in line by heavenly chastisement and divinely inspired reforming prophets, kings, and/or legislators. Throughout this cycle it is the sin of idolatry that is the most frequent and egregious failing. As a result, a sequence of good leaders—like Moses¹²¹, Hezekiah¹²², and Josiah¹²³—legislate against and break idols, while bad ones—such as Jeroboam¹²⁴ and Ahab¹²⁵—ignore divine law and set them up, with disastrous results.

¹¹⁴ Deuteronomy 7:2, 5.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Deuteronomy 12:30–31.

¹¹⁶ E.g. Numbers 25; Hosea 4:11–19.

¹¹⁷ E.g. Deuteronomy 4:28; Isaiah 44:9–20; Jeremiah 10:1–16.

¹¹⁸ Deuteronomy 4:15–20.

¹¹⁹ Exodus 37; 1 Kings 8:1–13.

¹²⁰ E.g. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 7:12–9:29.

¹²¹ Exodus 32.

¹²² 2 Kings 18:4.

¹²³ 2 Kings 23:15–16; 2 Chronicles 34:6–7.

¹²⁴ 1 Kings 12:25–33.

¹²⁵ 1 Kings 16:32–33.

In short, the Hebrew Bible is stridently, repeatedly, unavoidably anti-idolatry, and pro idol-destruction. However, it is not necessarily anti-image *per se*. After all, man was explicitly made in God's image.¹²⁶ Nor were man-made images necessarily bad, even in religious contexts. For instance, Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was adorned with engraved cherubim, palm trees, flowers, and animals.¹²⁷ From time to time, God even explicitly commanded the creation of images, such as when Moses was instructed to make two golden cherubim to place on either end of the lid for the Ark of the Covenant.¹²⁸ Perhaps the most instructive story also involves Moses. During their long sojourn in the desert after the exodus from Egypt the Israelites repeatedly grumbled about their lot. On one such occasion, God punished their lack of faith by sending poisonous snakes among them. As they repented of their sin, Moses was commanded by God to make a Bronze Serpent that would cure all those who looked upon it.¹²⁹ In a sign of the complexity of the biblical texts, this Bronze Serpent was later destroyed by the reforming King Hezekiah, as it had become an object of worship, with the Israelites making offerings to it.¹³⁰ Hence, an image could be created on the specific commands of God and have curative and apotropaic powers, but thanks to the erroneous cultic actions of later people be praiseworthy destroyed as an idol.

The Hebrew Bible, therefore, bequeathed to both Jews and Christians a complex of ideas and examples that could support a variety of stances toward religious art. Idolatry was clearly denounced as a truly terrible sin. But that begged the question: what constitutes idolatry? Worshipping other gods, characteristically in the form of man-made idols, was clearly the main definition and the predominant worry of the Old Testament. However, could art be used in any way to facilitate the worship of the one true God? Was it permissible to pictorially represent the great figures of scripture like Abraham or Moses, either as a portrait or as part of a narrative scene? What about the representation of living creatures, either in general or in religious contexts? Here the text is far more open to interpretation, and it is notable that across the centuries Jews have come up with different answers in different places and times.

For Christians, the New Testament added more complexity as well as a new interpretive lens through which to read the Old Testament. In some respects, it confirmed the general negativity towards religious figural imagery. Idolatry

126 Genesis 1:27.

127 1 Kings 7:29, 36.

128 Exodus 25:17–22.

129 Numbers 21:1–9.

130 2 Kings 18:4.

is frequently condemned as one of the many sins of the world that Christians must avoid.¹³¹ There is also a strong anti-materialistic strain in the New Testament, preferring the spiritual worship of the Word. For instance, Jesus declared:

the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.¹³²

Furthermore, despite the central importance of Jesus, the Gospels never describe his appearance, one reason for the remarkable range of representations in late antique art.

However, despite the general inheritance by the New Testament of the Old Testament's revulsion to idolatry, it is simply a less pressing issue in the later text(s) that occurs less frequently. For instance, Christ has nothing directly to say on the subject. This shift in focus can be seen in Jesus' famous response to a rich man's enquiry on how he could win eternal life. Christ replies that he must give up all his possessions, and obey the commandments, listing five of the ten: do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness, and honour your parents. This is one of the most influential passages in scripture and would be a principal inspiration behind the rise of asceticism in late antiquity.¹³³ Notably absent from Christ's response is anything about idolatry. Of course, this passage can be interpreted as a call against the more subtle idolatry of placing anything before the worship of God. But even if one accepted that interpretation, the change in tone and emphasis is evident. Contemporary Judaism was aniconic, with worship ritually focused on the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which was free of overt idolatry in the form of cult statues. As such, when the New Testament criticizes the Jews, idolatry is either not given great prominence, or it is the more subtle idolatry of misdirected worship.

Where idolatry is explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, overwhelmingly it is not with a Jewish context in mind, but a pagan one. The nascent Christian communities dotting the Mediterranean were islands in a polytheistic sea, in which active idolatry in the form of making and directing worship towards statues of gods was ubiquitous. For Paul, not worshipping idols was to be one of the key points of difference between the Christians and the rest of sinful humanity:

¹³¹ E.g. Ephesians 5:5; 1 Peter 4:3.

¹³² John 4:23–24.

¹³³ Matthew 19:16–30.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revellers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.¹³⁴

Idolatry is here still important, and still directly associated with immorality generally and sexual sin especially. However, it is also one marker among many.

Moreover, the New Testament also provided some spurs to the creation of religious figural imagery. A whole host of new stories were added to the stock provided by the Old Testament that could potentially inspire artistic representation. Most importantly, there was the Incarnation itself. That God the Father took on flesh as God the Son, inevitably provided a new way for Christians to think about representing the divine. The formless God of the Old Testament had taken a form, even if the description is no more specific than he was a man. Indeed, the New Testament frequently refers to Christ as the image of God.¹³⁵ This provided one of the most powerful, and obvious, potential defences against the charge that depicting Christ was idolatrous. Moreover, God becoming visible could then affect the interpretation of the idea that man was made in God's image.

Hence, when it came to the topic of religious art, early Christians inherited a complex array of injunctions and stories from the Bible. Some things were clear: idolatry was a dangerous sin, and certainly comprised the worship of false gods, characteristically in the creation and/or veneration of cultic statues. But beyond that the precise boundaries of the illicit were open to debate.

3.1.2 The Classical World

Christianity emerged in the context of the Roman Empire, and its interaction with the classical world would fundamentally shape it. This provided a notably, if not entirely, different set of ideas and practices when it came to art. Greco-Roman art celebrated the human body, and figural imagery of people and animals was everywhere.¹³⁶ This included depicting the divine. It was part of the religious common sense of the classical world that images of the gods could and should be made, some of which could and should be the focus of

¹³⁴ 1 Corinthians 9-10.

¹³⁵ E.g. Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4.

¹³⁶ For an introduction to Roman art, see Mary Beard and John Henderson, *Classical Art: From Greece to Rome* (Oxford: 2001), and Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire A.D. 100-450* (Oxford: 1998).

various cultic practices.¹³⁷ For presumably many viewers, the cult statue was more than a simple representation, a reminder, a useful focusing tool for worship. Rather, it embodied or mediated the divine, making it in a way really present and therefore engaged with the ritual being performed with it. In short, the kind of idolatry condemned in the Old Testament was ubiquitous in the Roman world, and the Jewish and Christian rejection of it really did mark them off from the religious mainstream.

However, Greco-Roman art was never confined merely to representations of the gods and myths; images of the divine were never neatly delineated to a single function or context of the kind a modern would anachronistically label “religious”. Rather scenes from myth and depictions of gods and heroes are found in so many different media and contexts that they clearly could have a range of functions and meanings. The polyvalency of Greco-Roman art, even when depicting the gods, meant it was a visual language that could be used by many to communicate manifold things.

Furthermore, while it is undeniable that figural imagery was everywhere, images, both in general and of the divine, were not uncontested. Indeed, a strain of ancient philosophy is markedly cautious, and on occasion overtly hostile, towards art. Most notably Plato deemed images a poor imitation of objects, which themselves are imperfect manifestations of perfect forms. Hence, art is merely a copy of a copy, and so either of low importance or worse, a dangerous distraction from higher things. The latter is a particular threat, as Plato acknowledged the potential emotive force of art.¹³⁸ Other philosophers focused more directly on the problem of depicting the divine, some explicitly mocking idols as useless, base, man-made things worshipped by the uneducated. Such elitism neatly aligned with the preference of many philosophers for the spiritual and intellectual over the material. However, not all philosophers were image sceptics, with for instance Aristotle defending the worthiness of matter and the abilities of the artist.¹³⁹

The power, ubiquity, and danger of images can be neatly seen in the imperial image. This was projected through multiple media throughout the Roman

137 For an introduction to paganism, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (London: 1981).

138 Plato was not always derogatory towards images. See Ladner, “The Concept of the Image,” 5–7 for how Platonic thought eventually embraced the notion of a perfect image, an idea that then influenced the Cappadocian Fathers and through them the iconophiles.

139 For an overview of the classical Greek philosophers on images, see Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: 2000), 13–42.

Empire. This included both images promulgated from the centre, like those found on coins, and those set up by provincials, such as the imperial statues erected by local elites. These statues were more than mere representations. In a way they projected the emperor as if he were really present.

The potency of the imperial image is perhaps best revealed in the context of its destruction. Unlicensed by the centre, this was treated as an act of rebellion, that warranted severe penalties. However, the centre could also use destruction to punish a fallen emperor or minister. This was part of the practice of *damnatio memoriae*, the damning of someone's memory through the public removal of their name and image.¹⁴⁰ *Damnatio memoriae*, whether involving the total or only partial destruction of someone's image, worked because all understood the significance and power of images. This was a practice of imperially-sponsored, indeed often imperially-organized, image destruction designed, at least in part, to purify the public sphere.

The classical world therefore offered Christians another complex discourse around images that included defence and criticism, creation and destruction.

3.1.3 The Emergence of Christian Art

The story of how a recognisably Christian art developed out of this complex mixture is taken up in this volume by Robin Jensen. As Jensen notes, this occurred around the year 200 A.D., and both the lack of Christian art before this point and its emergence has elicited a vast body of scholarship.

Until relatively recently, much of this scholarship was influenced by the debates that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. The early Christians were too often seen as idealized proto-Protestants, faithful adherents to the Second Commandment and proponents of a spiritualized worship that had no need of religious art. However, as the pagan masses converted, they brought with them their popular attachments to cult practices including the use of figural art. Unable to hold the line, the Church eventually adopted such practices.

As Jensen recounts, a more nuanced and less anachronistic account has emerged since the 1970s, in part spurred on by discoveries and reevaluations concerning Jewish art. It is now widely recognized that many Jewish communities in late antiquity felt able to utilize religious figural imagery, and engage more widely in the visual culture of the classical world.¹⁴¹ This is most famously testified to in the 3rd-century synagogue at Dura-Europos, on the Roman

140 Harriet Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: 2006).

141 For Jewish art in the Roman world, see Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 2005).

frontier with Persia in Syria. This is one of the oldest discovered synagogues and is remarkably well preserved. Notably, its walls survive, and they are covered with narrative scenes taken from the Hebrew Bible. If Jews felt no compunction in depicting figures like Moses, despite the Second Commandment, it is hardly surprising that contemporary Christians also engaged in figural art, and indeed there is a house-church at Dura-Europos that also liberally covered its walls with scenes from scripture. Rather than being condemned as idols, these images were seen as symbolic, decorative, or narrative images. They therefore fell into the category of “harmless art”, distinct from harmful cult images designed for devotional use.

It is increasingly clear from surviving material culture that Jews and Christians did not live in hermetically sealed boxes separate from the wider Roman world. Rather, they engaged with it. This included an acceptance of figural representation in general, and its use to depict religious figures. This could be both in overt religious settings like a church or synagogue, but also in the domestic sphere. Figures from scripture appear on media as diverse as lamps and signet rings. In style and technique there is often little to nothing to distinguish these figures from mainstream classical art. What was different was the subject matter, and indeed that is often the only way to identify an object or building as Jewish or Christian. A repertoire of images emerged, which varied over time and context, that the faithful could use to proclaim their religious identity and demarcate themselves from their neighbours. Even then, there was often an overlap, Jews and Christians adopting the visual vocabulary of their neighbours even if it was employed to say something different.

Therefore, as Jensen argues, when we approach Christian texts from the 2nd and 3rd centuries we must be careful not to over-interpret their strident anti-idolatry message as a critique of Christian images. Rather, the concerns of men like Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria were primarily to criticize the making and venerating of images of the traditional Greco-Roman deities. To simplify and aggregate a complex series of arguments, the early Christian critique of idols was that God was incorporeal, and so beyond representation. Man-made fabrications from base matter could not mediate the divine presence, and, while idols were therefore basically worthless, they were also dangerous in misdirecting worship from the transcendent God to the idol. However, the principal focus was not on the cult statues themselves, but on how they were approached. In essence an object was turned into a dangerous idol by idolatry, the sin being the illegitimate worship of the fabricated.

Such ideas clearly have a grounding in the Bible, and the critics do cite scripture to support their arguments, including on occasion the Second Commandment. However, the Old Testament and the Second Commandment

are not as dominant as might be expected. This is because many of these arguments are aimed at defending Christianity from pagan critics such as Celsus, who would have given no weight to arguments based on scriptures they did not accept. Therefore, alongside scriptural arguments one finds critiques drawn from ancient philosophy. Indeed, it is a common strategy among Christian apologists to present Christianity as adhering more closely to the precepts of notable philosophers than crude pagans did.

Christian art was inevitably transformed by Christianity's transition in the 4th century from illicit cult to the state religion of the Roman Empire. Over the 4th and 5th centuries a tidal wave of patronage created innumerable Christian buildings and objects that would increasingly come to dominate the Roman public sphere. New repertoires of images emerged and older ones faded to better articulate this altered world. Moreover, the rise of the cult of saints meant that was an ever-increasing cast of Christian figures that could be depicted. Again, such images were not confined to churches and shrines. Christian figural imagery can be found in many domestic spaces, from the mosaics of the rich to simple ceramic lamps and tableware of the humble. By ca. 500 Christianity was well on its way to becoming the hegemonic cultural force in the Roman world, and depictions of Christ, the Virgin, the prophets, apostles, and saints were everywhere.

Alongside this flowering of Christian art came an explosion of Christian texts. Yet out of the millions of words that have come down to us, only a tiny insignificant proportion discuss Christian imagery. An odd few did worry about the potential for idolatry that came from the mix of mass conversion of former pagans and the huge generation of Christian art. For instance, in the late 4th century Epiphanius of Salamis is alleged to have attacked depictions of Christ and the apostles as the false inventions of painters painted according to their own whims. He also tore down a curtain in a church that was painted with an image of Christ or perhaps a saint, condemning it as an idol. Or maybe he did. The authenticity of these passages has been contested since the time of iconoclasm, as the iconoclasts pointed to them as justification for their own arguments, while iconophiles charged the iconoclasts with inventing them.

As Jensen notes, even if we accept the authenticity of these and similar texts, what concern there was over imagery in the 4th and 5th centuries mostly concentrated on images of Christ. In contrast, images of saints and martyrs, when mentioned at all, tended to be condoned. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–395) praised images of saints as they could instruct and emotionally move the beholder, and hopefully thereby encourage emulation of the saint by the viewer. However, on the whole, the great age of patristic writings essentially ignored art.

Nothing better reveals this paucity of interest better than the research of the iconoclasts and iconophiles themselves. Both sides sought to prove the antiquity and legitimacy of their own views by collecting anthologies of supporting texts, and they would have combed the texts of the Church Fathers especially thoroughly. That they found so little is definitive testimony that there simply was no significant debate on Christian imagery in this period. Notably even the eventual star witness for the iconophiles is not really concerned with images *per se*. For Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329–79), in explaining the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, compares this relationship to that between the emperor and his image. People treat the image of the emperor as if it were the emperor, while knowing there is a difference. Image and object are linked, and the honour shown to the image passes over to the one depicted. Basil was not here referring to Christian art, his interest was in the Trinity, and certainly he was not condoning the cultic veneration of Christian figural imagery. Indeed, had this been common and unproblematic Basil might well have used the analogy of a saint and his image. Yet Basil's analogy relies on people assuming that there was a close relationship between at least some images and some subjects, that at least on some occasions images could mediate between the viewer and the person depicted as if the person were really there. This was an ancient and common belief and it is easy to imagine how some might have attached it to Christian figural imagery, even if our texts do not mention it.

Why though the relative silence of our texts? One obvious reason would be that, despite the likelihood that some among the fast-growing number of Christians believed that among the ever-increasing number of images of Christ or the saints some could act as if the person depicted by them were really present, and that on occasion acts such as the lighting of candles were performed before them, there was as yet no widespread cult of Christian images that attracted either criticism or defence. Another important reason is that other matters were simply much more important and urgent. Compared to the fundamental theological problems associated with defining the Trinity and the nature of Christ, and all the issues raised by the rise of ascetism, the potential problems of Christian art were much less significant. Put another way, when bishops met in councils, or writers penned homilies or saints lives other topics mattered much more to them than art.

It is also probably because, if and when anyone did think about the issue, the vast majority of contemporary Christian art objects and the practices associated with them would have been deemed by most to have fallen into the category of "harmless art", things that were either neutral or mildly useful, an idea that as we have seen had precedents even in the vociferously anti-idolatry Old Testament. For most, the criticisms levelled at pagans by Christians still did not

apply to Christians themselves despite the explosion of art. After all, Christ and the saints had been real people, not the phantoms of pagan imagination. And Christians did not worship their images. Rather they merely used art to embellish sacred spaces, to commemorate the martyrs and saints, and to instruct the faithful in the stories from the scriptures.

Furthermore, on balance the continued existence of paganism made Christians less likely to worry about their own art. Christianity's anti-idolatry strain had an obvious external focus, the cultic statues of the pagan gods. Moreover, that focus continued to be on condemning the acts of idolatry more than on the objects of worship themselves. However, some Christians, particularly after temples were closed and public sacrifices prohibited in the 380s, did physically attack temples and cast down pagan idols. Lionized in some texts, these acts added a new generation of heroic idol smashers to the cast from the Old Testament to inspire future Christians. Yet, we must note that this was never the official policy of the state or the Church, and the fate of temples and cultic statues was very varied. Outright destruction was the exception rather than the rule.

The real and constructed "otherness" of paganism in the Christian imagination made it easier to draw a stark distinction between pagan idolatry and Christian images. Indeed, this had a direct impact on the emergence of Christian art. As Jensen notes, amid all the flurry of creation, much of which drew heavily on classical traditions, one previously very important medium was missing: Christian sculpture in the round was exceedingly rare, presumably because it was simply too similar to cult statues. Partially as a result churches and shrines looked and functioned differently to temples. Rather than being focused on a man-made statue, they were articulated around an altar where Christ was mysteriously made present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

As noted above, late antique Christianity witnessed a proliferation of material mediators of the divine beyond the Eucharist. The cults of the cross and relics both emerged in the 4th century and had become ubiquitous, if not entirely unchallenged, in the 5th. Therefore, late antique Christians did increasingly perform the sorts of cultic actions—lighting lamps, prostration, kissing—focused on material objects that they condemned when pagans did it. However, a Christian apologist would argue that there was a fundamental difference between worshipping a man-made statue of a false god and paying respect to the sign of the True God or venerating the material remains of a saint.

By the start of the 6th century a Christian Roman world had emerged. Countless images of Christ, the Virgin, prophets, apostles, and saints existed. While a few commented upon this, either negatively or favourably, mostly the

phenomenon went unremarked. This is in marked contrast to the manifold texts that speak about the cults of the cross, of saints, and relics, presumably because far greater importance was vested in them than in Christian figural imagery. Over the next two centuries this would begin to change.

3.1.4 The Rise of the Icon?

Study of 6th- and 7th-century Christian-Roman art is overwhelmingly focused on icons, with a long scholarly tradition dating the rise of the icon from relative obscurity to ubiquity to this period, at least in the Eastern Mediterranean. However, as Benjamin Anderson tells us, this attention to the icon is not a fair reflection of what actually happened at the time. If one were to judge the period entirely on its own merits other changes were more obviously significant, such as the ending of the production of statuary. Moreover, when one looks at surviving Christian art, including the small corpus of extant icons, one is struck more by continuity than change. Therefore, considered purely from the material remains, if there was a “rise of the icon” it was as much due to the relative falling away of secular imagery than any absolute increase in Christian figural art.

The focus on icons is due to what happened next, i.e. iconoclasm. The iconoclasts and iconophiles themselves delved into the past to find support for their respective positions. Indeed, revisionist scholars argue that the iconophiles, whose side of the story is the one that we largely have to work with, improved upon what they found, inserting more and more spectacular mentions of icons and icon-veneration into narrative accounts. More certainly, their cataloguing efforts are a major reason why we possess many tales purporting to come from the 6th and 7th centuries that mention icons. Often these are marginal references. We are told of people praying in front of icons, lighting candles before them, and icons being carried around in procession. On occasion icons become more central to the narrative as the sites of miracles, though it is important to note that in most cases the image did not exercise power directly but through another medium. For example, the future saint Theodore of Sykeon was miraculously cured of the plague as a child while praying before an icon of Christ when dew fell from the image onto the bubo.¹⁴²

By far the most famous of the wonder-working icons were the *acheiropoieta*, miraculous images usually of Christ “not-made-by-human-hands” that begin to be recorded from around the middle of the 6th century. The best known is

¹⁴² Christopher Sweeney, “Holy Images and Holy Matter: Images in the Performance of Miracles in the Age before Iconoclasm,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 26 (2018), 111–38, 128.

the Mandylion of Edessa, a miraculous imprint of Christ's face onto a cloth supposedly sent by Jesus to King Agbar of Edessa.¹⁴³ Interestingly, this image was a late 6th-century accretion onto an established legend that did not mention a miraculous icon, probably a sign of changing attitudes about how holiness could manifest. Among much else, the Mandylion was supposed to have aided Edessa during the siege of the city by the Persians in 544. A similar protective role was accorded to another *acheiropoieton* paraded around the walls of Constantinople during the siege of 626.

While Christianity seemed to embrace figural imagery ever more closely from the 6th century on, contemporary Judaism notably turned away from it. Indeed, some synagogues witnessed a form of iconoclasm, with older depictions of humans and animals removed. This is often very hard to date and was probably more of a 7th- and especially 8th-century phenomenon, but it may well have occasionally occurred in the 6th.¹⁴⁴ Whatever the reasons for this development, it meant that there was an increasingly obvious religious divide over art. Jews, whether in reality or in the Christian imagination, became the arch-critics of Christian veneration of images, condemning it as an infraction of the Second Commandment against idolatry. This led some, most famously Leontios of Neapolis discussed below, to defend Christians from Jewish accusations, though we should note that veneration of the cross, saints, and relics were more significant aspects of this debate than icons.

How one chooses to interpret this marked increase in textual references to icons has led to notably different interpretations of the period. In 1954 Ernst Kitzinger argued, in one of the most influential articles on Byzantine art and iconoclasm ever written, that this narrative corpus demonstrated a marked increase in the prominence and significance of icons from the middle of the 6th century onwards.¹⁴⁵ This inexorable rise eventually resulted in a backlash in the form of iconoclasm. However, revisionists such as Leslie Brubaker have argued that a more critical reading of the sources would date the rise of the icon much later, in Brubaker's version to ca. 680.¹⁴⁶ Iconoclasm is still seen as a reaction, but to a much more recent phenomenon. As Anderson points out, much depends on what precisely one means by "icon". If one is speaking about general depictions of Christ, the Virgin, and saints then they were undoubtedly ubiquitous in Byzantium, and already were by ca. 500. What is much more

143 Cameron, "Image of Edessa."

144 Noa Yuval-Hacham, "'You Shall Not Make for Yourself Any Graven Image ...': On Jewish Iconoclasm in Late Antiquity," *Ars Judaica* 6 (2010), 7–22.

145 Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm."

146 Leslie Brubaker, "Icons before Iconoclasm?" *SSCIS* 45 (1998), 1215–1254.

difficult to pin down is the belief that a depiction of Christ, the Virgin, or a saint could function as a window to its subject, that the image could act and be treated as if the person depicted were really present. With such a belief, icons could transmit the divine in a manner that had previously been restricted to relics, and so could attract forms of veneration, such as kissing and prostration, that had once been the preserve of relics. For Brubaker, the only images that regularly received such cult veneration before the last quarter of the 7th century were the *acheiropoieta*, which due to the miraculous nature of their fabrication and supposed antiquity were considered relics rather than images. Earlier references were largely interpolations by later iconophiles.

To this debate Anderson adds the cautionary words of Jaś Elsner that the rise in the number of texts reporting icons and practices involving icons might not reflect a change in social practice at all but merely an uptick in “textual noise.”¹⁴⁷ Rather than trying to construct a “line-chart” of increasing ubiquity and potency of icons from the surviving texts, which both Kitzinger and Brubaker do, Anderson suggests we should accept that there were a plethora of practices and ideas concerning images. Instead of rehashing arguments over all the individual sources, Anderson focuses on two textual sources, namely the 692 Quinisext Council and inscriptions attached to images, that throw particular light on how different discourses understood Christian imagery in this period.

The Quinisext Council is famous in the story of Byzantine art largely due to its injunction in canon 82 that from henceforth Christ should not be depicted symbolically as a lamb but as a man. Combined with the nearly contemporaneous depiction of Christ on Byzantine coins for the first time this does represent a clear endorsement by Church and state of Christian figural imagery in general and of Christ in particular. However, whether this is a reaction to a recent uptake in icons (Brubaker and Haldon) or merely recognition of a long-accomplished fact (Kitzinger) is debatable. Furthermore, canon 82 is one of three canons (out of 102) at Quinisext that deals with art. Never before had canon law concerned itself with art.¹⁴⁸ Does this newfound regulatory zeal of art prefigure later iconoclasm?¹⁴⁹ Anderson is sceptical. Quinisext’s engagement with art is distinctly limited. Clearly other matters were far higher up the agenda and there is no sign that the assembled bishops had any systematic

147 Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse,” 372.

148 Leslie Brubaker, “In the beginning was the Word: Art and Orthodoxy at the councils of Trullo (692) and Nicaea II (787),” in Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies* (Aldershot: 2006), 95–101.

149 As argued by Barber, *Figure and Likeness*.

interest in establishing any coherent regulation of Christian art. Perhaps more important was the general purificatory mindset of the council, which sought to win divine support through moral reform. Such a mentality, clearly shared by the Isaurians, made a closer regulation of Christian art a more likely prospect, though hardly an inevitable one.

Anderson then turns to a distinctly understudied corpus of texts, namely the inscriptions attached to various images. These have some distinct advantages for us as they are far less likely to have suffered from later iconophile tampering, and they directly engage with an image. What is really striking about these inscriptions is the very wide range of types and functions that survive. As Anderson notes, "Images were both surrounded by and engaged in conversation. People talked about pictures and to pictures; pictures talked to people and to themselves. The boundaries between viewers and images were porous and crossed repeatedly." These include inscriptions that assume the viewer directly addresses the depicted being in a manner akin to the narrow definition of an icon promoted by Brubaker. This would seem to be conclusive evidence that some people could approach some images as if they could act as a means of communication with the person being depicted long before ca. 680. Indeed, as noted already, this was an idea deeply rooted in Greco-Roman art. Interestingly, so was debate about what images could and could not convey. In complete contrast to the limited and rather unsophisticated interventions at Quinisext, the inscriptions provide evidence of "a sophisticated and widely disseminated discourse within which art's multiple capacities had already been many times entertained, dismissed, and asserted once more."

The debate over icons before iconoclasm has largely revolved around texts. This is despite of the richness of the surviving material culture from the 6th and 7th centuries, too large and diverse to survey in detail in this volume. Ever more Christian figural imagery continued to be created. While not every church was crammed with depictions of Christ, the Virgin, prophets, and saints—for instance Justinian I's reconstruction in the mid-6th century of Hagia Sophia, the largest and most important church in the empire, was notably aniconic and decorated primarily with mosaic crosses—many were. Furthermore, Christian figural imagery could be found in streets, shops, and houses. Notable examples are the *eulogiae*, "blessings," pottery tokens baked from the earth taken from a saint's shrine or containing holy oil from it, the most common being those of the famous healing Saint Menas. Imprinted with a picture of the saint, they acted as both a memento of a pilgrimage and a container of holiness.¹⁵⁰ It is

150 Gary Vikan, "Icons and Icon Piety in Early Byzantium," in Gary Vikan, *Sacred Images and Sacred Power in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003), Essay II.

easy to imagine how through such associations of image and relic the practices of veneration once reserved for a relic gradually and fitfully were transferred to the image as well.

Among the many media used to represent Christian holy personages were also what we would today call “icons”, painted pictures on wooden boards that first survive in any number from this period. Some of these depict narrative scenes, but most are simple, frontal portraits. In form these are not markedly different from depictions found in other media, such as mosaic, though the preponderance of frontal portraits means that wooden icons more often directly engage the eyes of the viewer. The main difference is in cost and access. Painted icons on wood were relatively cheap and portable, offering potentially private modes of devotion outside the confines of a church. Almost certainly these are the images referred to in most of our texts. Exactly how common such icons were remains open to interpretation.

Icons in both the narrow and general sense could fulfil several different functions, varying according to the image, the viewer, and the context. For Brubaker and Haldon, before ca. 680 those functions could include decoration, commemoration, and thanksgiving, but not generally direct veneration, which was still reserved for relics.¹⁵¹ However, even when we can discern what the original or primary intended function of an image was meant to be, there was always a possibility that it received veneration as well. This was especially likely when the image was frontal, inviting the gaze of the viewer, and when in close proximity to the viewer, whether that was in a private space or in the lower registers of churches and so closer to the eyeline. It is true that the physical evidence of image-veneration for such is limited, but then after so many centuries how much archaeological trace should we expect to find? Moreover, as Anderson contends, there is greater physical evidence for acts of veneration before icons in churches—such as hooks for lamps or the presentation of gifts—before the end of the 7th century than Brubaker and Haldon allow. However, the evidence is regionally varied, with the best and earliest examples from Rome. Perhaps the cult of images was more advanced in Rome than in Constantinople, though there is little reason to believe so. More probably this represents the exceptional number, good preservation, and exhaustive study of the churches of Rome.

Indeed, according to Anderson, the noted similarities between old and new Rome in art and Christian practice raises an important question: why did iconoclasm only arise in Byzantium? Anderson’s admittedly partial answer is

151 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 29–66.

that alongside the commonalities, Constantinople and its environs had two notable differences. Firstly, its churches from the late 7th century onwards focused their decorations on matters of Christology to a far greater extent than in Rome. Did this stir up debate over the proper way of representing Christ? It is certainly plausible, especially given the stark contrast between these new decorative schemes and the essentially aniconic decoration of some older churches such as Hagia Sophia. Secondly, these new churches were founded by a still powerful and relatively autonomous aristocracy, and often were part of monastic foundations more under the control of their rich patrons than their local bishops. This reveals one of the potential dangers of icons, noted in particular by Peter Brown: whether it was an aristocrat embellishing a church or a more humble person using a wooden image of a saint as a devotional aid, icons were beyond the control of both emperors and bishops.¹⁵² They offered a way outside of the imperial church to reach heaven.

By ca. 700 some key conditions for iconoclasm had been laid. Christian figural imagery was everywhere, and a cult of images was common. To a degree, Church and state had endorsed the phenomenon, and had made their support, indeed their preference, for figural images of Christ unambiguous. Yet while these moves might have harnessed the icon, they most certainly did not control it. At the same time, emperors and bishops had subscribed to the notion that the empire's ills could be resolved through a purificatory programme of moral reformation of the population witnessed by the canons of the Quinisext Council, a programme that could potentially encompass at least elements of Christian art. However, the fact that Byzantium embraced some form of iconoclasm around a quarter century later was not an inevitable outcome of these processes. What transformed iconoclasm from potentiality to actual policy choice, and what actually occurred, are the subjects of Part 3 in the present study. But before one can attempt to tackle this topic, we must turn our attention to our sources.

3.2 *The Sources for Byzantine Iconoclasm*

Ad fontes—to the sources!—is the traditional cry of scholarship. It is a call that scholars of Byzantine iconoclasm have embraced with enthusiasm. Essentially every text and object that might have a bearing on the issue has attracted decades of scholarly analysis. To a large degree this is due to the sources themselves. As Cyril Mango noted in 1977, however we interpret it, much of our “material is and will remain pretty scrappy.”¹⁵³ The totality of evidence is not

152 Brown, “Dark-Age Controversy.”

153 Mango, “Historical Introduction,” 6.

vast, often leaving scholars perilously reliant on a few or even just one source. Basic questions such as authorship, provenance, and date are frequently ambiguous and contested. Much is unknown and will remain unknowable. Worse, it has always been recognized that what survives is perilously lopsided. Overwhelmingly what we possess was generated by the iconophiles. This would be problematic if the debates over icons were genteel affairs conducted with some degree of attempted objectivity. They were not. For the participants, or at least the most ardent ones who often created our sources, Orthodox souls were on the line. Given the stakes, iconophiles had every incentive to use the full rhetorical toolkit of insult, exaggeration, selectivity, and misinterpretation of motive to blacken their opponents' reputations. These problems have long been recognized, and have intimately inflected the best work on the subject.

However, since Mango's wise words, many scholars have gone further. Influenced by postmodernism and its challenge to see sources not as repositories of facts to be excavated, but as constructed narratives designed to tell a story, the texts and material culture have been interrogated anew and found to be even more difficult and dangerous. The charge sheet now includes deliberate creation and mythmaking, and not just distortion. Some famous events that once structured our narrative are declared fables. The result is that one's analysis of Byzantine iconoclasm varies hugely according to just how sceptical one is over the sources; the more sceptical, the more the traditional narrative of destruction and contention comes into doubt. Wherever one stands, this wave of source criticism has opened the subject to new interpretations, and hugely invigorated debate. However, it has also meant the field has become more potted with pitfalls for the newcomer than ever before.

It is the purpose of Part 2 of this volume to act as guide through these minefields. Inevitably not every text or object can be scrutinized. Instead, the task given to the contributors was to outline the general problems, and then to focus on what were deemed the key sources for Byzantine iconoclasm. In their different ways, all three chapters fruitfully engage with the recent wave of source criticism, while on occasion coming to different conclusions that are, on the whole, less sceptical than the most radical of recent interpretations. However, the aim of these chapters is not to definitively declare on what are difficult, and often unsolvable, problems. Rather it is to critically survey our sources, examining both their limitations and their potential.

3.2.1 Histories, Chronicles, and Letters

Jesse Torgerson and Mike Humphreys begin the task by exploring those texts that traditionally constitute the basis of narrative history, namely the works that proclaim themselves histories, chronicles, or letters. Indeed, they insist

that this self-positioning within a genre was significant. Whether something is entitled a chronicle or a letter shaped both how it was read and how it was constructed. Certain topics were to be highlighted, others marginalized, and all set within a particular textual frame. Modern readers must resist the urge to “mine” such texts for “facts” with little regard to the way the information within was packaged and altered by that presentation.

Another critical form of packaging overlooked at a scholar’s peril are the manuscripts in which our texts survive. When we read a critical edition or, more likely for most, a modern translation—itself a transformation of the original that however good inevitably adds another layer of potential distortion—there is a strong desire to see the printed text as the same as that produced and read in the past. In reality texts in the medieval world were not fixed, but altered from manuscript to manuscript. In part this was because the contents changed, whether due to the carelessness of a copying scribe or to more major editorial reworking. But in part it was also because texts very rarely filled an entire manuscript in themselves. Rather they were bound with other works, a codicological proximity that would have affected how they were read.

Linked to these points on genre and manuscript transmission, Torgerson and Humphreys make another that is relevant for all our sources: they were not produced for us. In particular, our sources were not produced for a modern academic audience seeking for an objective account of the whos, whens, wheres, and whys of Byzantine iconoclasm. What we possess are partial—both in the sense of incomplete and of partisan—pieces of rhetoric intended to persuade rather than disinterestedly convey data. Even if everything that was recorded in a text such as Theophanes’ *Chronicle* was entirely accurate, and there is every reason to believe that it was not, it was selected and organized to construct a narrative. Therefore, we need to carefully read the entirety of our sources, and not just hone in on the sections most obviously relevant to iconoclasm. Only once we have recognized the narratives that the text seeks to tell, and the ways it shapes its content to express those stories, can we hope to read against the grain and reconstruct other interpretations. One should also note that our sources are not all solely concerned with iconoclasm. No one should doubt that iconoclasm was an important issue, or that in many of our texts it was the dominant subject. However, it was not the only one. We must be careful not to over-read our interest in iconoclasm into the sources, and even less into wider Byzantine society.

A final call made by Torgerson and Humphreys is for Byzantinists to pay careful attention to the sources produced outside Byzantium. Of course, these are beset by their own problems. However, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, and Arabic sources all shed light on the period as a whole, and on iconoclasm in particular.

Certainly, it is often illuminating to compare the frequently positive image of the “iconoclast” rulers in many, though far from all, non-Byzantine sources with that of our mostly iconophile Byzantine texts. Indeed, rulers such as Leo III and Constantine V are often not associated with iconoclasm at all, or it is a relatively minor aspect of their reigns.

Perhaps none of the texts examined in Chapter 3 reveal more of the complexities, but also the possibilities for scholars than the *Chronicle* or *Chronography* of George Synkellos and Theophanes. Much scholarly ink has been spilt debating which of the two was more responsible for what we possess, and the extent to which either one selected and edited their sources. What is in no doubt is George/Theophanes’ vehement partisanship for the iconophile cause. The abuse heaped on the iconoclasts, especially Constantine V, is remarkable. As Torgerson and Humphreys argue, this reflects the time when the chronicle was composed, ca. 808–13, a period of mounting troubles for the officially iconophile empire, tribulations that were causing a rising nostalgia for the Isaurian emperors and iconoclasm. The need to stop this led to iconophiles blackening the Isaurians’ reputations through hyperbolic rhetoric and the circulation of stories that painted them as tyrants oppressing the righteous. Hence, Torgerson and Humphreys agree with the arguments of Auzépy that several of the most famous stories of iconoclasm, including the destruction of the Chalke icon in 726, are most likely myths generated during the Iconophile Intermission.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, they go further by noting that different manuscript traditions emplotted the events, real or otherwise, surrounding the origins of Byzantine iconoclasm in different ways within the chronological framework in order to construct subtly different narratives.

However, we can do more than merely repeat the narratives of George/Theophanes. Not only can we seek, despite the difficulties, to read against the grain and give different interpretations to the actions and beliefs of the iconoclasts than those imputed by Theophanes. We can also compare Theophanes to the narratives constructed in other texts sharing the same sources. In particular, comparisons on the one hand to Nikephoros—with whom Theophanes shared a common Byzantine source—and on the other to the material originally from Theophilus of Edessa—now scattered among many texts produced outside Byzantium—reveal much.¹⁵⁵ One can see how new stories such as, for example, the destruction of the Chalke icon, accreted to the grand narrative.

¹⁵⁴ Auzépy, “La destruction de l’icône.”

¹⁵⁵ Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington, DC: 1990); Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: 2011).

Further, it becomes obvious how Theophanes twisted and combined his material to give the worse possible interpretation, such as making Leo III seem a slavish adherent of Jews and Muslims. Yet, one also finds corroboration of some actions that some sceptics have doubted, such as Leo III being involved in a letter exchange with Umar II. Texts like Theophanes' are difficult and to be approached with caution, but with care can still shed considerable light on this murky period and controversy.

3.2.2 Church *Acta*, Treatises, and Hagiography

A similar note of cautious optimism sounds through Richard Price's chapter on the acts of church councils, "theological" treatises and tracts, and saints' lives. Yes, several texts exhibit marks of being rewritten and interpolated, with the questions of when and by whom frequently very difficult to answer. Yes, the texts were shaped by their genre in ways that may obscure or distort the information we seek. Above all, our evidence base is hugely lopsided. Inevitably we know more about the eventually victorious party than we do about the losers. But Price argues that while scepticism is useful and often justified, one should not take it too far. In particular, we can overstate the extent of deliberate destruction, suppression, and misinformation. Probably the greatest reason why so few iconoclast texts survive is that there was little to no incentive to recopy their works (an expensive process, we must remember), once they had been declared heretical, in contrast to the texts of those remembered as champions of Orthodoxy. Given just how much has been lost to the ravages of time, it might be considered remarkable just how much we can reconstruct with some safety.

Take for instance the different fates of the *acta* of the various church councils. Only a small portion of the material produced at the iconoclast councils of 754 and 815 survives, and then only in iconophile texts seeking to rebut them. In comparison, the iconophile *acta* are vast, with those of the Second Council of Nicaea, held in 787, being by some distance the longest text, or more accurately dossier of documents, surviving on the subject of iconoclasm.¹⁵⁶ Inevitably, this means we can say far more about the iconophile argument, and its strategies for denouncing the iconoclasts, than we can about the iconoclast. Yet, despite the misleading rhetoric, there is no reason to believe the iconophiles doctored the texts of the iconoclast councils. Indeed, by being so thorough in its rebuttal, Nicaea preserved in its entirety the *horos* ("definition")

¹⁵⁶ *Second Council of Nicaea*, ed. Erich Lambergz, *ACO* 2.3, 3 vols (Berlin: 2008–16); trans. Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), 2 vols (Liverpool: 2018).

of the 754 Council of Hieria. Without this we would have far less information about iconoclasm.

However, it is also evident that thanks to what survives—a process that is far from neutral—not only do we know more about the iconophiles than iconoclasts, we know more about some moments and issues than others. Thanks to the preservation of Hieria's *horos* and fragments of Constantine v's *Peuseis*—tracts written and circulated in preparation for Hieria—we have far more detail about the iconoclast position in the early 750s than at any other period.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, much of it is focused on Christology and its implications for depictions of Christ. But as Price argues, images of saints might well have been a more important focus of iconoclast concern given their greater ubiquity. The emphasis on Christology was due to the desire to place Hieria in the tradition of previous ecumenical councils, and so to condemn icon veneration as a heresy. We should be wary of taking the argument presented at Hieria as a perfect summation of iconoclast thought in the 750s, and doubly wary of using it as definitive evidence of what all iconoclasts thought before and after.

The very nature of ecumenical councils, and even more so of the *acta* that present them to the world, also limits the information they provide. Their aim was to proclaim and affirm truth, and certainly in the case of Nicaea that truth had been decided well in advance of the council. Hence, as Price notes, anyone reading Nicaea in search of a high-quality theological debate on icons or an accurate summary of its history will be disappointed. Instead, what one finds is the victorious party line: icons and their veneration were a tradition-hallowed aspect of Orthodox worship. In presenting that message there was no need to engage in sophisticated debate. Rather, it was more effective to insult the iconoclasts as influenced by Jews and Muslims.

Another key strategy was to compile a long anthology, or *florilegium*, of texts that sought to prove the antiquity of icon veneration. Presented at the fourth session of Nicaea, this has been the focus of much scholarship as it remains the textual bedrock of evidence for icons before iconoclasm. As such the extent to which one thinks that the iconophiles doctored these texts, either at Nicaea or before, to provide evidence for their cause affects how one dates the rise of the cult of the icon. While some of these do show marked signs of interpolation, Price generally argues against the more radical scepticism of Speck, Brubaker, and Haldon. For instance, Price maintains that the long citation from Leontios of Neapolis' tract *Against the Jews* really does date to the second quarter of the 7th century. As such, it provides useful testimony to the existence of a cult

¹⁵⁷ For the surviving fragments of the *Peuseis* see Ostrogorsky, *Studien*, 8–11.

of icons by the early 7th century at the latest, and that those practices were criticized by Jews, whose criticisms were given greater urgency by the empire's then perilous political situation. Perhaps what is most revealing, however, about Leontios' evidence is that icons were perceived even by their defenders as a secondary feature, coming very firmly after the cult of saints, relics, and the cross.

Indeed, what strikes a neutral reader of Nicaea's *florilegium* is the relative paucity of its evidence. The compilers could not find any church father explicitly supporting icons, as none had, not necessarily because they objected to images—the iconoclasts also struggled to find significant patristic support—but because it was not then an object of debate. Hence Nicaea had to rely on distinctly more recent and less authoritative figures like Leontios, hagiography, and statements from Church Fathers that were not originally about icons but could be used in such a way. Had the iconophiles, and indeed the iconoclasts, been as creative as is sometimes argued one might have expected more material, claiming to be from more authoritative sources, being more explicitly concerned about religious imagery and its use in Christian worship.

Immediately after this *florilegium* come three of the most important documents in the history of iconoclasm, namely the letters of Germanos. Price rejects the attempt to see the last and longest of these as a product of the 740s and prefers the traditional dating of all to the beginnings of the controversy in the 720s.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, Price notes that these letters serve two broader purposes found throughout Nicaea. The first is to turn Germanos, in reality a rather limited opponent of iconoclasm, into an iconophile hero, and through him to exculpate the patriarchate from association with iconoclasm. The second is to shift blame from the Isaurians, who were still the ruling dynasty in 787, to iconoclast bishops, especially Constantine of Nakoleia. Indeed, in the commentary to his recent translation of Nicaea, Price argues that the curious story of Leo III setting up an image in the last section of Germanos' letter to Thomas of Klaudiopolis, which has received considerable attention and has been used by Brubaker and Haldon to cast doubt on the extent of Leo's support for iconoclasm, looks distinctly like a later interpolation.¹⁵⁹ Certainly, it serves Nicaea's wider attempt to deflect blame from the Isaurians.

Turning to the treatises that survive, it is clear from Price's survey that, despite all being penned by iconophiles, they vary markedly. Some are detailed, sophisticated theological tracts. Others are more polemical pamphlets. Some

¹⁵⁸ For the later date, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 94–105, 186–87.

¹⁵⁹ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 102–03; Brubaker, *Inventing*, 24; Price, *Nicaea*, 352–53, nn.524–28.

can be dated closely, and we can be certain about authorship. Others are far harder to pin down and were probably rewritten at various stages. One feature common to most is the significance of Constantine v. Not only did he provide new iconoclast arguments that some of the treatises directly contend with. More significantly, the memory of his successful rule was also evidently one of the strongest supports for the iconoclasts. Hence, considerable space in theoretically theological tracts is committed to besmirching the political and personal reputation of Constantine v. Alone among the treatises in this regard are those by John of Damascus. Price strongly defends the traditional dating of John of Damascus' first two treatises to ca. 726–30 against recent suggestions that they date to the late 740s or later.¹⁶⁰ This means that they are precious, roughly contemporary, sources for iconoclasm under Leo III. Not only do they reinforce the traditional narrative that Leo III was the key mover of iconoclasm, at least to the perspective of an outsider, but a careful reading would suggest that there was a diversity in iconoclast opinion about what images were permissible. For some it was only images of saints that were problematic, a stance very different from the focus of Christ so evident at Hiereia. While these treatises are often difficult to use, this example illuminates their potential to provide a more complex and nuanced narrative than might at first be supposed.

Finally, Price examines the hagiographical sources. For First Iconoclasm, that means essentially the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, a highly polemical work that distorts much.¹⁶¹ Written during the anxious closing years of the Iconophile Intermission, it seeks to cut the ground out from the growing support for iconoclasm and the good memory of Constantine v by recycling insulting stories. It deliberately casts monks as the defenders of images *par excellence* when other evidence suggests the existence of iconoclast monks. Likewise, it makes the martyrdom of Stephen in the mid-760s a result purely of his iconophilia, when both Theophanes and Nikephoros cast it as more part of Constantine's supposed anti-monasticism. Less obviously mendacious are the long lives of patriarchs Tarasios and Nikephoros, penned by the former iconoclast Ignatios the

160 John of Damascus, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3 (Berlin: 1975); trans. Andrew Louth, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: 2003). Brubaker and Haldon accept the arguments of Speck that John was responding to the arguments of Constantine v, and so the treatises should be dated to the late 740s–50s; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 248–49; *History*, 183–89.

161 Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune* (Aldershot: 1997).

Deacon after 843.¹⁶² Nevertheless, it is clear that Ignatios was creative with the truth. For instance, he notably downplayed the role of Irene in the restoration of icons, not just to enhance the prestige of Tarasios but also to disassociate the unpopular empress from the iconophile cause.

Notably, Price dislikes the term “iconoclast lives” appended to those saints’ lives that eschew mention of icons, but instead focus on aspects such as almsgiving that the iconoclasts are supposed to have emphasized in their preferred model of saintliness. Certainly, there is nothing in these lives that is actively anti-icon, and all emphasize long-standing features of hagiography; that is after all why they were read and copied after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. More significantly, Price notes that icons and icon veneration were often relatively minor aspects of even explicitly iconophile saints’ lives produced in the 9th century. Similarly, mentions of miracles worked by icons are exceedingly rare. To an extent it is we who, in our search for evidence about iconoclasm, make these lives about iconoclasm. Clearly it mattered, but it was one theme among many, and to judge by Byzantine hagiography even by the late 9th century icons were not yet the dominant feature of religious practice they would become.

3.2.3 The Material Evidence

Anyone turning from the textual to the material evidence seeking greater certainty will be disappointed. The surviving objects and buildings are as complex and difficult as any text. Problems abound, with often heated and inter-related disputes over date, provenance, subject and meaning. Yet, as Sabine Feist argues in her chapter, for all its difficulties the material evidence for the period is richer than we often suppose and is just as important for understanding iconoclasm and the broader era as the textual corpus.

For examples of the difficulties one need look no further than to the small number of extant icons. Does the extremely low survival rate reflect the effects of iconoclasm? Probably not. Apart from a smattering from Rome, almost all survive from just one place, the monastery of St Catherine’s at Mt Sinai in Egypt. Such extreme localisation reflects the peculiar geographical and institutional context of St Catherine’s, circumstances that made possible the survival of such fragile items over the centuries. However, immediately the question arises of whether its icons reflect a broader Orthodox world, or merely the local one in the Sinai peninsula? This is almost impossible to answer as we can rarely be certain where an icon now in Sinai was originally produced. Likewise,

162 Stephanos Efthymiadis, *The Life of the Patriarch Tarasios by Ignatios the Deacon* (Aldershot: 1998); *Life of Nikephoros*, ed. Carolus de Boor, *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opuscula historica* (Leipzig: 1880), 139–217.

we cannot be certain about dating, with educated guesses legitimately differing on occasion by centuries. Given such difficulties, any conclusions drawn must be hedged round with caveats.

Similar problems beset interpretation of the Trier ivory. This small ivory panel has become a much-contested object largely due to its depiction, in the background of its main scene, of the Chalke icon. For revisionists, the tale of the destruction of the Chalke icon by Leo III is a myth, in part because there was no such icon in the 720s for Leo to destroy. If the Trier ivory is, as some have argued, a 5th-century object then it proves this is wrong, or at least that there was a Chalke icon. However, others have argued that it is a product of the late 8th century, and therefore it proves nothing vis-à-vis the tale of Leo III's iconoclasm. As its closest stylistic comparators are late 9th century, the latter is probably correct, but one cannot be certain. Nor indeed can one be certain exactly what scene is depicted.

Yet, despite such issues the material evidence can tell us much. First, as Feist repeatedly argues, we must shed any negative connotations implicitly held about the period. Inevitably, the term "iconoclasm" leads one to focus on destruction of art rather than its creation, another reason perhaps why it is unhelpful to label the period "iconoclast". In reality, the era was neither devoid of art in general nor of figural imagery in particular. Yes, there is less surviving from the mid-7th through to the mid-9th centuries than from the periods before and after. However, this does not reflect either the destructiveness of the iconoclasts or their philistinism, as the iconophiles would have us believe. Rather, it is a result of the era's impoverished state compared to the relative riches of late antiquity and the Middle Byzantine era. Even so, many of the surviving pieces attest to Byzantium's continuing ability and desire to create objects and buildings of high technical quality. No one inspecting one of the richly embroidered surviving silks, the manuscript illustrations adorning Ptolemy's Handy Tables, or the massive glittering mosaic cross in the apse of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople could say that "iconoclast" Byzantium was devoid of art. Indeed, there is a good case to be made that Constantine V, remembered as the worst of iconoclasts, was in fact one of the great patrons of Byzantine art and architecture.¹⁶³

Furthermore, the material evidence makes clear that Byzantine iconoclasm evidently had no problem with figural imagery per se. Emperors continued to be depicted on coins, whatever their stance on religious figural imagery. Other secular figural imagery, such as charioteers and hunters abound on the silks.

¹⁶³ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 161–63, 212–27.

Classical representations such as those of zodiac are found in the Ptolemy manuscript. Indeed, we know thanks to the enigmatic text the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* that Constantinople continued to be filled with statuary from the ancient world, even if it could be viewed with suspicion by some.¹⁶⁴ The wrath of the Byzantine iconoclasts was confined to Christian figural imagery.

Even here though the extant material evidence rejects any simple story of mass destruction. At least some preexisting Christian figural imagery survived unharmed. For instance, the mosaics at Hagios Demetrios in Thessalonica, including of the eponymous Saint Demetrios, show no signs of being damaged. Perhaps they were covered over during those periods when iconoclasm was official dogma, but we do not know.¹⁶⁵ Another interesting insight comes from the miniatures of the Khludov Psalter. Produced in the immediate aftermath of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, this associates the iconoclasts with those who tortured Christ on the cross. Yet this stridently anti-iconoclast object does not depict the iconoclasts destroying icons, but rather whitewashing them.

Even when we have definite proof of deliberate alteration, “iconoclasm”, the physical destruction of images, is often a misleading description. Take the small *sekretion* or council hall of the patriarchate in Hagia Sophia. In the late 760s the iconoclast patriarch replaced its mosaic depictions of saints with crosses. This was the very nerve centre of the Byzantine Church. Yet it took decades after the supposed start of iconoclasm for images of saints to be removed. Moreover, while this could be called an act of iconoclasm, this was not mindless vandalism but a careful replacement of one set of Christian imagery with another that iconoclasts and iconophiles alike could accept. Although the evidence is limited, a similar pattern can be seen in other churches. In particular, mosaic crosses were installed in many apses, some of which were never replaced after iconoclasm, while others were.

Indeed, the continued use of the cross—a Christian symbol that both long predated and outlasted the iconoclast controversy, and which to judge by the coins and seals the Isaurians promoted well before embarking on any criticism of icons—supports one of Feist’s central theses, namely that the “iconoclast” period was a bridge or interface between late antiquity and Middle Byzantium, not an aberration that belongs outside the grand narrative of Byzantine art.

164 *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. and trans. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden: 1984). For a discussion of this text, see Chapter 3 in the present volume.

165 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 412.

Both the continuities and the peculiarities of the period can best be seen in the surviving churches. These were nearly all late antique constructions, and even when considerable renovation work occurred great effort was undertaken to maintain their exteriors. It was in the interior that a new form emerged, dominated by a central dome. Furthermore, while the evidence is sparse and hard to date, it seems that figural depictions, for instance of the prophets, were used at least in some churches. A new decorative scheme was emerging that was designed to reflect the celestial hierarchy, and that helped to distinguish the sacred space of the church from the profane outside world. In this, Feist argues, the iconoclast period was laying the foundations for the churches of later Byzantine eras. So, the material evidence reveals a world of creation as well as destruction, of continuity and change. Most of all it testifies to a world that though indubitably shaped by the iconoclast controversy was more complicated than just iconoclast versus iconophile.

3.3 *Byzantine Iconoclasm in Action*

What actually happened in Byzantine iconoclasm? Who did what, when, and why? Just how much destruction was there? How many were persecuted? How much support did either side have? As readers of Part 2 will appreciate, the difficulties of the sources make these questions very hard to answer. Yet it is the task of Part 3 of this volume to offer some answers, however hedged round with caveats. Of all the sections of this book, this owes most and hews closest to the arguments of the revisionists, which is hardly surprising given that one of the chapters is written by Marie-France Auzépy, one of the leading lights of revisionist interpretations of the period. However, neither chapter fully endorses all the revisionist claims made by Speck, Brubaker, and Haldon. Nor does either chapter claim to be definitive or comprehensive. Too much happened in the period and our sources are too difficult to ever promise that, let alone within the space allowed. Instead, both contributors were tasked with critically presenting what they considered the key moments and pieces of information for Byzantine iconoclasm and providing sufficient contextual information to make some sense of them. As always in this *Companion*, readers may well not agree with the interpretations given, but hopefully everything is presented in such a manner that they may attempt to make informed answers of their own to the much-vexed question of what actually happened in Byzantine iconoclasm, and why.

3.3.1 First Iconoclasm

Nearly everything about the first phase of Byzantine iconoclasm is contested. As Mike Humphreys notes, this is a direct reflection of our sources and the

myriad of approaches scholars have taken towards them. In general, the more faith one places in our sources the more iconoclasm looms large as a major controversy, with widespread destruction, resistance, and persecution. In contrast, the more sceptical one is the more iconoclasm recedes into the background, undeniably significant but just one strand among many, with destruction and opposition limited and sporadic. Furthermore, even if one were to generally accept the factual accuracy of our sources there would be much to debate. For the sources do not tell one coherent story. Rather they proffer many different narratives from which a reader must weave their own.

Take for instance the seemingly simple question of when iconoclasm began and who instigated it. Most of our sources do not provide any real narrative detail. For example, the three treatises of John of Damascus, while explicitly condemning Leo III are exceedingly hazy on what actually happened. Indeed, their lack of chronological exactitude allows some scholars to argue, incorrectly according to Humphreys, that the texts were not products of the 720s or 730s, but rather of the late 740s and so a reaction to events under Constantine V not Leo.

A similar argument can be made concerning the three letters of Germanos, the patriarch of Constantinople deposed in 730 supposedly for his opposition to iconoclasm. Preserved in the *acta* of Nicaea these have always received considerable scholarly attention as the earliest surviving documents of the controversy. Yet they offer no concrete evidence as to when they were written, beyond the fact that the first two were definitely composed while Germanos was patriarch. Indeed, they are even less precise about events than John of Damascus, overwhelmingly focused on offering a (rather mild) defence for icon veneration. They also give the impression that iconoclasm first arose as a debate within the episcopacy, or more particularly with the objections of one bishop, namely Constantine of Nakoleia. The emperors are notable only for their absence, save for one much discussed passage that has the iconoclast Leo III setting up an image of the cross, prophets, and apostles.

Even when we turn to those texts whose explicit purpose was to provide a narrative, we find distinctly different accounts. If one were just to read Nikephoros' *Short History* one would find a bare but plausible tale: Leo III reacted to the massive eruption of the volcanic island of Thira in 726 by concluding that divine wrath had been kindled by idolatry.¹⁶⁶ In contrast, Theophanes has iconoclasm begin in the Caliphate as the creation of a Jewish wizard in 722/23. This inspired Leo III, who by 724/25 had publicly begun to

166 Nikephoros, *Short History*, 60.

speak on the subject earning a rebuke from the pope. The eruption of Thira thus takes place after Leo had already turned to heresy, but rather than learning from this reproof Leo starts to actively destroy icons, beginning with the icon on the Chalke gate to the palace. Much of this has been rightly criticised by recent sceptics as iconophile myth-making seeking to blacken the reputations of the iconoclasts. However, it was Theophanes' narrative that became the remembered version in later Byzantine history and underpins many modern accounts.¹⁶⁷

Our sources therefore offer multiple different viewpoints on iconoclasm in its earliest phases. Some imply that destruction was very limited, others state it was widespread. Germanos' letters can be read as saying the controversy began and was essentially contained within the Church, while the great majority point to Leo III as the principal iconoclast. One could argue from the evidence that iconoclasm was generated principally as a reaction to internal processes, spurred on by the dramatic explosion of Thira. At the same time, the sources also support the idea that external forces, especially the war with the Arabs, were a key factor.

Amid these uncertainties, one can say with confidence that something significant happened in the late 720s. While the extent of actual destruction can be legitimately debated, too many independent sources comment upon a controversy to be ignored. Though the specifics of the debate are probably unrecoverable, the core charge of the iconoclasts was that icon veneration was idolatrous, and it was this that had provoked God's anger, evident in the empire's precarious position. Moreover, Humphreys argues that whoever else was involved, the actor who really mattered was Leo III. It was his decision to embrace iconoclasm in some form that transformed the scale of the controversy.

What precisely Leo did is again debateable. Sometime around 726 his regime began talking about icon veneration. Leo tried to gain support for his position from both pope and patriarch, but failed. Finally, in 730 Germanos was replaced, and some kind of document was issued on the subject. In all probability, this did not call for mass destruction of icons, but rather focused on condemning the practices associated with icon veneration. This would fit with the long focus in Christian thought on idolatrous actions being the main problem rather than the actual objects being wrongly worshipped. The enforcement of this document would then be left in the hands of local actors,

167 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 402–06. See for instance the narrative in Ostrogorsky, *History*, 160–65.

notably the bishops, to remedy the situation as they saw fit, resulting in different responses and levels of destruction.

Why did iconoclasm start when and where it did? Why did Leo and the other actors involved do what they did? As Humphreys notes, the fundamental answer is simple. The Byzantines believed that their many travails were punishments sent by God because of their sins. The problem is why idolatry was identified as at least one of those sins, and why it happened in the 720s.

All sensible answers combine processes internal to Byzantine Christianity, such as the rise in the prominence of the icon, with external forces, such as the massive disruption caused by the Arab conquests. Indeed, it is impossible to separate the two completely. Likewise, long-term factors, for example the latent anti-idolatry strain in Christianity inherited from the Old Testament, and the more immediate context, like the eruption of Thira, both played a role. Legitimate scholarly dispute arises from where one places the emphasis on different factors.

Most recent scholarship has focused on internal processes, especially the rise of the icon. Clearly this was of fundamental importance. However, while the existence of a widespread cult of images is a necessary condition for iconoclasm it is not a sufficient one. More particularly, it does not explain why iconoclasm, in whatever form, was adopted in the 720s specifically. Even if one accepts the short chronology of Brubaker that this only fully emerged from ca. 680, why should it take decades for a reaction to come? Indeed, why a reaction at all? As noted above, in the late 7th century the first impulse of state and Church was to promote icons, or at least the figural image of Christ. Byzantium's subsequent near-death experience over the following three decades of internal strife and military defeat must have made the question of why God was punishing his Chosen People critically urgent. Yet idolatry was not among Leo III's answers in the first years of his reign. It was only because there was a resurgence of troubles for the empire in the mid-720s, including both the spectacular eruption of Thira and a resurgence of war with the Caliphate, that a new answer for divine ire was sought. Almost certainly it was Byzantium's gradual recovery from this point on that did more than anything else to validate iconoclasm.

Humphreys points to two ideological shifts that help explain the novel focus on idolatry. The first was a shift most obviously seen in the Quinisext Council away from matters of orthodoxy towards those of orthopraxy, correct practice. The path to divine favour was declared to lie with moral reformation and the purging of deviant practices. The second was that the Isaurians modelled their reign more closely and entirely on the pattern of the Old Testament than any previous imperial regime. As such, it made the identification of idolatry, the

most common sin of the Israelites, as the source of God's wrath much more likely.

All of this needs to be set in the context of the challenge posed by the Arab conquests. Indeed, Humphreys goes further than most recent scholars in arguing for the significance of Islam in causing Byzantine iconoclasm. The Caliphate was not only the greatest threat facing the empire, it also adopted a diametrically different attitude to religious figural imagery to Byzantium. While we must not uncritically swallow the calumnies of the iconophiles that iconoclasm was a creation of Jews and Muslims and fundamentally alien to the Orthodox tradition, we can allow that some Byzantines may have pointed to the stark difference between the fates of the Caliphate and the empire and explained it through reference to their different stands on religious imagery. After all, it would have reinforced the criticisms generated from within the Christian tradition and especially the Old Testament. It would also offer a way for Christians to explain the success of the Arabs as good anti-idolaters, without having to accept any core Islamic doctrine that was at variance with the fundamental tenets of Christianity. What is important to remember is that this was one possible response to Islam. There were a myriad, just as there were many causes of Byzantine iconoclasm. Indeed, while we tend to lump all iconoclasts and iconophiles into two well-defined parties, there was probably a large variety of views and a considerable number who were apathetic about the whole issue.

Whatever the reasons, Leo did support iconoclasm, at least to the degree that he supported moves against the veneration of Christian figural imagery as he deemed it idolatrous. However, to judge from the silence of the sources, always a dangerous thing to do, the icon question was only a pressing issue for a few years in his long reign. After 730 we hear nothing concrete about the issue until the late 740s and the reign of Constantine V. Precisely why the controversy intensified then is unclear, but the recent civil war and the outbreak of plague probably provided ammunition to the iconophiles that God was angry. The iconoclast response was unquestionably led by Constantine V, who we are told personally led a campaign of persuasion. This included shifting the focus of the iconoclast argument onto matters of Christology, claiming that the making of images of Christ was heretical as doing so made one either a Monophysite or a Nestorian. The campaign of persuasion culminated in 754 with the self-proclaimed ecumenical Council of Hiereia. This made icon veneration an official heresy, and thereby branded iconophiles heretics liable to established heresy laws. Although Hiereia forbade any future creation of Christian figural imagery, it did not call for a mass campaign of destruction.

While it is plausible that destruction increased after Hiereia, we cannot be certain. There is also little evidence of any organized resistance to Hiereia.

It is only in the mid-760s that one finds Constantine meeting opposition and meting out punishment in response. Moreover, the extent to which any of the famous persecutions of these years are linked to iconoclasm is doubtful. Most sources highlight the role of Constantine's supposed anti-monasticism not iconoclasm. Furthermore, it is clear that most were punished for their involvement in a failed plot. Of course, they might also have been committed iconophiles, and that might have been one reason for their opposition to Constantine, but the evidence is lacking. On the other hand, there must have been some link for Constantine subsequently imposed an oath, either on all officeholders and soldiers or the entire population, not to venerate icons. This was a marked intensification of enforcement, but again it was focused on stopping actions rather than smashing objects.

First Iconoclasm then was episodic and merely one aspect of this critical period. Both the level of persecution and resistance has been exaggerated. At the same time considerable argument was generated and the issue was a significant one. It was a key plank in the Isaurians' religious policies, though not the only one. Actual destruction was probably fitful and varied, dependant more on local actors than the dictates of Constantinople. However, it is likely that by 780 a considerable recasting of the public sphere had occurred, with far fewer figural depictions of Christ, the Virgin, and saints, and far more crosses. It was triggered by a variety of interlocking factors, above all the purifying drive designed to propitiate divine anger most obviously manifested in the defeats to the Arabs. The Isaurians' victories were the best evidence for the success of iconoclasm. When Constantine V died in 775 he bequeathed a stable and prosperous empire, an entrenched dynasty, and a Church that had embraced iconoclasm as official dogma for two decades. Ironically, however, this very success in stabilizing Byzantium removed the sense that God was angry. This opened a path for a dramatic reversal of policy that few could have imagined in 775, or even 780 on the death of Leo IV.

3.3.2 The Iconophile Intermission and Second Iconoclasm

It is one of those strange chronological coincidences that the period between the accession of Leo III in 717 and the death of his grandson Leo IV in 780, and that from then to the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 are both precisely 63 years long. However, as Marie-France Auzépy informs us, the latter is very much in the shadow of the former.

Firstly, there is a marked disjuncture in the historical reality, at least in political terms. The period from 717 to 780 witnessed just three emperors, father

following son, all dying peacefully, and with distinctly more military victories than defeats. The period 780–843 saw seven rulers, most of whom died violently, five different dynasties, and notable military defeats. Most starkly, whereas Constantine V expanded imperial control in the Balkans and won several major victories against the Bulgars, in 811 Nikephoros I was killed in a disastrous defeat and his skull turned into a drinking cup by the Bulgar Khagan. This difference was noted by contemporaries. Indeed, we are explicitly told that the reimposition of iconoclasm in 815 was driven by Leo V's desire to model himself on the successful Isaurians rather than their conspicuously unsuccessful, iconophile successors. The subsequent failure to replicate the earlier iconoclasts' record of success was probably a principal driver of the repudiation of iconoclasm in 843.

Then there is the question of our sources. As Auzépy cogently argues, the Iconophile Intermission was a critical time for the writing, or rewriting, of history. It saw, *inter alia* and in rough chronological order, the creation of Nikephoros' *Short History*, the acts of Nicaea II, the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, and the *Chronicle* of Theophanes. For all their many problems, these often detailed works are our principal sources for First Iconoclasm. In contrast, our understanding of the narrative history of 780 to 813 is for long stretches solely reliant on Theophanes. We are in an even worse position after Theophanes ends, as the subsequent narrative sources are either highly polemical, or much later, or both. As Auzépy neatly puts it, much of the period remains in a "documentary fog created by the discord among sources and historians' varying, not to say contradictory, interpretations". Occasionally this fog is pierced by shafts of light from the many saints' lives produced in the period and immediately after 843, though perhaps the most significant aspect for us is their rather limited focus on iconoclasm. What we lack is perhaps best revealed by a high-quality, contemporary source that sadly only survives in fragments, namely the *Scriptor Incertus*.¹⁶⁸ This provides a detailed account of the beginnings of Leo V's reign (813–20), including the return to iconoclasm. However, nothing equivalent survives for the remainder of the period, including for the shift back to icons. As a result, the "Triumph of Orthodoxy" remains and probably shall forever remain shrouded in mystery.

Finally and relatedly, the study of Second Iconoclasm has often tended to be overshadowed by that of First Iconoclasm. Second Iconoclasm seems less dramatic, less destructive, less rancorous, and simply less important to contemporaries than its 8th-century counterpart. One suspects that this reflects

¹⁶⁸ *Scriptor Incertus*, ed. and Italian trans. Francesca Iadevaia (2nd ed., Messina: 1997).

the successful rewriting of First Iconoclasm into a grand narrative of destruction, oppression, and resistance, as much as any real diminution in vehemency and significance. The positive memory of Constantine V was the main support for iconoclasm. Therefore, the iconophiles spent a huge portion of time besmirching it. Hence, there was an established iconoclast villain who could take centre-stage in the remembrance of the heresy. In contrast, the memory of the iconoclast Theophilos (829–42) was protected to some degree as part of the deal by which his widow Theodora, regent for their son Michael III (842–67), supported the return to icons. Even so, Second Iconoclasm does seem to have been generally milder than its first incarnation.

Why though did that first version end? Traditionally the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 is described as “restoring” icons. In reality, Auzépy argues, Nicaea instituted a cult of images for the first time. Prior to iconoclasm, icon veneration had been a possibility practiced by some, not an officially endorsed and even required part of Orthodox practice. To underestimate Nicaea’s radicalism on this point is to uncritically swallow its carefully constructed message that it was merely re-establishing time-hallowed traditions.

Furthermore, one should not underestimate the scale of the challenge for the iconophiles. For decades the Byzantine population had been educated that certain practices involving religious images, such as prostration and kissing, were idolatrous. The whole episcopacy was officially iconoclast. And the dynasty that had instituted iconoclasm was still ruling and notably popular. Hardly surprising then that the repudiation of iconoclasm met considerable resistance. The first attempt to hold a council on the issue in Constantinople in 786 was broken up by iconoclast bishops supported by soldiers from the elite *tagmata* units established by Constantine V and loyal to his legacy. It required impressive political and diplomatic skills by the regent Irene and her chosen patriarch, Tarasios, to push through the change, as well as a degree of ruthlessness. Notably Irene neutralised the *tagmata* by tricking them into believing they were to go on campaign, and once out of Constantinople promptly cashiering them. To deliver her seemingly unpopular “re-establishment” of icons, Irene was prepared to undermine the empire’s military capacity.

The question thus arises is why? Clearly there were committed iconophiles in Byzantium, but there is no reason to believe that they outnumbered devoted iconoclasts. There were also losers from the changes the Isaurians had brought about who could be mobilized to support a change in policy, notably the older landed elite who were displaced by a rising military aristocracy. Even among the soldiery, there were relative losers. For instance, the creation of the elite *Tagmata* by Constantine V went hand in hand with his break-up of the *Opsikion* army. It is therefore unsurprising that the site chosen for the second

and successful attempt at a council was Nicaea. Not only had the first ecumenical council held under Constantine I met there, thereby nicely reinforcing the message of a return to tradition, but Nicaea was also the capital of the *Opsikion* theme. Evidently there were powerbases that could be marshalled to support Irene's regime, yet there is no real evidence to believe that they were all ardent iconophiles.

In the end it seems that the change was a deliberate choice by Irene. Perhaps she was a true believer but, given that it was Constantine V who had chosen her as a bride for his son Leo IV she must have hidden any iconophilia very well. Nor after 787 did she engage in any obvious pro-iconophile moves. More likely, Irene chose her path for cold political reasons. As a female regent she was in a perilous situation. Her gender barred her from garnering legitimacy as Leo III and Constantine V had done by personally leading armies. What she could do was install an ally as patriarch, which she duly did in 784. The calling of a council also allowed her to play the role of champion of Orthodoxy, as a second Helena, mother of Constantine I. The policy change also acted as a loyalty test, and a way to flush out opponents. Furthermore, the decision by Irene and Tarasios to allow the iconoclast bishops to publicly repent and be readmitted into the episcopacy not only weakened the opposition, it placed the recanting bishops in Irene's debt. Add to this that the shift offered the chance to create a rapprochement with the papacy, which might in turn ease relations with the Franks, with whom Irene was trying to broker a marriage alliance for her son with a daughter of Charlemagne.¹⁶⁹ Whatever the reasons, Irene and Tarasios successfully steered proceedings and icons were "restored."

Had Byzantium flourished after 787 that might have been the end of the matter. However, internal political wrangles combined with defeats to the newly aggressive Abbasid Caliphate and Bulgars kept the iconoclast flame burning. The iconophiles tried to stem the tide by polemical rewriting of history. Evidently, though, they were unable to sway a critical mass of contemporaries, as Leo V returned to iconoclasm seemingly without great difficulty. In a careful analysis of the sources, Auzépy offers a revised narrative of the return of iconoclasm. In 814 Leo began his campaign of persuasion by having a commission, including the future patriarch John the Grammarian, compile a dossier of pro-iconoclast texts. This did not sway Patriarch Nikephoros, nor several leading churchmen and abbots including Theodore the Studite. On the streets, however, support for iconoclasm was clearer, with soldiers throwing stones at the Chalke icon set up by Irene, in a rerun of the probably fabricated story

169 For relations with the Franks, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 252–60.

of Leo III's iconoclasm. After a brief pause in hostilities over Christmas, Leo v made his pro-iconoclast position plain, and by Easter 815 Nikephoros had been deposed and a new iconoclast patriarch elected. A synod was called that repudiated Nicaea, castigated as the work of a foolish woman, and restored Hiereia. However, in a sign of the relative moderation of Second Iconoclasm, the rhetoric was toned down. Icon veneration and icon-making were merely superfluous and erroneous practices, not idolatry.¹⁷⁰

A group of prominent iconophiles, led by Nikephoros and Theodore, refused to submit to the new regime, and were exiled to a series of places, usually monasteries. Although one should not downplay the privations of what amounted to a form of imprisonment, one should also not exaggerate this persecution. Theodore had sufficient access to parchment and ink to send numerous letters, including of encouragement to other iconophile exiles. From these we can discern the existence of an iconophile network that kept resistance going. However, it is also clear that most bishops and monks as well as secular elites accepted iconoclasm, at least in so far as to remain in communion with the patriarch and so continue to recognize his authority.

Thanks to the survival of a letter of Michael II (820–29) to the Frankish emperor Louis the Pious, we have a good idea about what sorts of practices Second Iconoclasm attacked.¹⁷¹ Not all images in churches were to be removed, only those low down that might attract improper cultic practices like kisses. Other excesses, such as mixing scrapings from icons into the Eucharistic wine or serving the bread on an icon, were also prohibited. Other evidence suggests Michael II was largely uninterested in religious matters, and simply maintained the established policy on icons but allowed those exiled under Leo to return.

Second Iconoclasm's equivalent to Constantine v was Theophilos (829–42): a largely successful emperor, who was a patron of the arts in general, and under whom iconoclasm intensified to at least some degree. In 833 a more comprehensive programme of persecution was undertaken against those who refused to be in communion with the official church, with exile for prominent resisters and confiscation of property for those who helped them.¹⁷² However, Auzépy argues that many of the more spectacular instances of persecution made famous in later hagiographies were not solely or even mainly about resistance to iconoclasm. Rather, there was usually another political aspect,

170 Paul Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and its Definition (*Horos*)," *DOP* 7 (1953), 58–66, 41–42.

171 Michael II, *Epistula ad Ludovicum Imperatorem*, ed. Albert Werminghoff, *MGH, Leges* 111, *Concilia* 11.2 (Hanover: 1908), 475–80.

172 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 392–404.

such as the beating to death of Euthymios of Sardis in 831 because he had published prophecies about the death of Theophilos. Most iconophiles were not punished so cruelly. For instance, the iconophile monk and future patriarch Methodios was probably residing in the palace at the time of Theophilos' death in 842, rather than in a prison cell.¹⁷³ Most iconophiles or iconophile-sympathizers seem to have publicly submitted and were left alone.

The greatest unresolved and probably unresolvable mystery of Second Iconoclasm is why and how it ended. Evidently it had something to do with the sacking of Amorion, the birthplace of the dynasty, in 838 by the Arabs. As iconoclasm had been adopted, at least in part, as a way of garnering divine support and so win military victories, such a prominent defeat must have sown doubts. Moreover, it is unlikely to be a mere coincidence that the restoration of icons took place once again during a regency headed by an empress, this time Theophilos' widow Theodora. The fact that it took a year between Theophilos' death in 842 and the deposition of the iconoclast patriarch John the Grammarian and his replacement with Methodios suggests considerable planning and negotiation took place. However, thanks to the state of the sources we simply do not know precisely what happened or why. All we can say is that the regime around Theodora, made up of people who had been significant under Theophilos, decided to change course. Unlike in 787, this time the decision stuck.

3.4 *The Theology of Iconoclasm*

The role of theology in causing, sustaining, and ending Byzantine iconoclasm has been disputed almost as vehemently as the iconophiles and iconoclasts argued with each other. Scholarly opinion has swung from declaring the dispute was almost entirely about essentially religious questions, to virtually denying any role for theology whatsoever. Part 4 of this volume does not necessarily set out to resolve that debate. Rather its principal goal is to lay out what theological debates there were, or at least as much as we can reconstruct them given our sources. However, in doing so it will become clear that the contributors do not believe theology was a secondary issue, even if it was never the only issue. Rather there was intense debate on a myriad of interlocking topics.

While it is the case that both the defence and criticism of Christian images only achieved a degree of sophistication and systematization during the iconoclast controversy, neither side created their arguments from nothing. Both sides could point to support from the Bible. Most obviously, iconoclasts could

¹⁷³ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 398.

cite the Second Commandment, while iconophiles could point to passages where God order the creation of images. Which side one felt was more convincing was bound up with other issues, such as the question of how Christians should interpret the Old Testament, and whether Christianity should be a more spiritualized religion or employ material props. These are problems inherent to Christianity that long predate and outlive iconoclasm.

Furthermore, while very few Church Fathers were much interested in imagery per se, there was a smattering of criticisms and defences. Among these the most famous would be the argument from Basil of Caesarea, probably the most influential Greek Father, that the honour paid to the image passes over to the original, though as we have already noted this was made in the context of imperial images as an analogy for the relationship within the Trinity and was not strictly about Christian images and their veneration. The iconoclasts could find succour in the strident anti-idolatry of the early Fathers; the iconophiles in the fact that this was directed at pagan cult statues not Christian practice. For the iconoclasts the general silence of the Church Fathers on the subject reinforced the idea that icon-veneration was a recent and dangerous development; for the iconophiles it proved that they tacitly approved of icons which they claimed had existed since the beginning of the Church and which if they had been a problem the Fathers would have condemned.

The debate became more concrete in the late 6th and 7th centuries. Or at least it does if one accepts the dating of key works, especially Leontios of Neapolis' *Against the Jews* to the early 7th century, as both Richard Price and Andrew Louth do in this volume. This tract defended Christian practices from Jewish criticism, among which was the veneration of images. Certainly, as we have already observed, by the 7th century a marked difference had emerged between increasingly aniconic Jewish synagogues and the proliferation of Christian images. Furthermore, the trials of the early 7th century, in particular the losses to the Persians including the capture of Jerusalem in 614 and the seizure of the relic of the True Cross kept there, were likely stimulants to debates over why God was punishing the self-proclaimed new Chosen People. However, we cannot be certain that any actual debate between Jews and Christians on the appropriateness of certain practices involving material forms of holiness took place. Perhaps the real debate was within Christianity, with sceptics being tarred with the brush of being Jewish-minded. For our purposes this unimportant. What matters is that a coherent defence of icon veneration had already emerged in the 7th century, from which we can also see the outlines of the criticisms. Evidently the Old Testament injunction against idolatry was crucial, and the first line of defence was to gather those passages from the Bible that supported the use of images in particular and the worthiness of

material things in general. Added on to that was a definitional argument, that Christians did not commit idolatry as they reserved true worship, *latreia*, to God while paying appropriate veneration, *proskynesis*, for those material mediators of the holy, such as the cross, relics, and images of saints that warranted it. While Leontios is evidence that the veneration of images had become widespread and had attracted criticisms either from without or within the Church, what is perhaps most striking is that it was a secondary issue. The key idea that Leontios defended was the appropriateness of material intermediaries between God and mankind, among which could be ranked images but with the cross and relics far more significant mediators of the divine. It was only with iconoclasm that the focus shifted decisively to images.

Another more shadowy debate emerged at this time that would feed into iconoclasm. For as we have noted while the cult of saints and relics had become embedded within mainstream Christianity, and the emperors especially from the later 6th century onwards sought to manipulate this to their own ends, there was also a much larger degree of scepticism than once thought. In particular, at a learned level there was the criticism that post-mortem activity was impossible, since souls entered a form of sleep after death. That being the case, there was no point in pleading for intercession from a saint, whether that was done in the presence of a relic or their picture. Again, this argument was not aimed in the first instance at icons, but was a more wide-ranging debate over intercession. However, it is possible to see how such scepticism could overlap with arguments that icons were useless and unnecessary.

The dominant theological argument of the 6th and 7th centuries however was the long-running debate over the nature of Christ. Exactly how and when this impacted the debate over icons is disputed. Certainly, there was no direct link between different Christologies and ideas towards icons. Indeed, the lack of a direct connection is one reason why both iconoclasts and iconophiles could accuse the other side of being Nestorians or Monophysites. However, given just how prominent these debates had been, it was always likely that arguments over Christology would become entwined at some stage with those over icons, if only to establish one's adherence to the established Orthodox position and paint one's opponents as heretics. Moreover, it is certainly plausible that the intense arguments over Christology did lead to a particular focus in Byzantium on images of Christ. Furthermore, the Quinisext Council's command that from henceforth Christ should be depicted in the human form he assumed in the Incarnation was an early form of the argument that the Incarnation made depictions of Christ not only possible but necessary.

There were then many strands within Christian thought that were present in Byzantium before the 8th century that might have led to the debate that did

arise. However, that debate was also *sui generis* and developed according to its own logic.

3.4.1 The Theological Debate in the Eighth Century

Andrew Louth leads us through the debate over icons as it emerged during First Iconoclasm. He immediately reminds us of our central problem: overwhelmingly we only have one side of the conversation. Largely we have to work out the position of the iconoclasts from the arguments of their opponents. Therefore, while we can examine the development of iconophile theology in considerable depth, the arguments of the iconoclasts will always be harder to discern.

The letters of Germanos are our earliest evidence. As Louth makes clear, Germanos was not the great apologist for image veneration legend would make him. In reality his position was moderate. Icons were permissible, but rather secondary elements within Orthodox worship. What Germanos aims to do is save icon-making and veneration from the charge of idolatry, in particular a charge made on the basis of the Second Commandment, revealing that this was the central argument of the iconoclasts. His defence is also traditional, pointing to places in the Old Testament where images were condoned. Indeed, in some respects Germanos is less theologically sophisticated and robust in his defence than Leontios of Neapolis had been a century earlier in his tract, lacking Leontios' clear distinction between *proskynesis*, "veneration", and *latreia*, "worship". Moreover, while the Incarnation is mentioned, it is not a prominent part of the defence. For Germanos acts of veneration performed before icons, such as the lighting of candles, were not idolatrous as the intention was to venerate the one depicted, not to worship the icon itself.

A distinctly more sophisticated and vehement defence of icons was offered by John of Damascus. John's first treatise, written around 726–30 according to Louth, is, given the traditional rapid timeframe, a remarkably detailed response to events in Byzantium. This is not evidence for a later date of composition, as some have argued, but rather a result of the context. Much of the first treatise did not break new ground. Like Germanos, John made use of the traditional counter to the Second Commandment by pointing to passages of the Old Testament that condoned images. More particularly, John leaned heavily on the work of Leontios of Neapolis. Leontios' tract was likely close to hand and the general subject of images already in the forefront of John's mind given events in Syria-Palestine. For, as Chapter 11 explores, it was precisely at this time that Islam was appropriating the public sphere of the Caliphate from Christianity, criticizing Christian practices including icon veneration, and probably undertaking, if briefly, a campaign of iconoclasm. This pressure in

turn seems to have led at least some within the churches of the Caliphate to engage in some iconoclasm of their own. No wonder, when news came from Constantinople that the emperor—the man in John's view supposed to defend the Church but not to interfere with it—had endorsed the iconoclasts, John was both incensed, comparing the emperor to a pirate, and in a position to offer a detailed defence.

John offers four key arguments. The first, and the one John will emphasize most, is that however one interprets the Old Testament, the Incarnation had changed everything. The invisible God had taken material form, and so could be depicted. This first argument neatly aligns with the second: God created matter, and so those who said He should only be worshipped spiritually were disdaining Creation, becoming akin to heretical Manicheans. Third, John defines the key terms *eikōn*, “image” and *proskynesis*, “veneration” in ways that not only validate icon veneration but make criticism of it an attack on the entire faith. While acts of veneration, such as prostrating oneself, are outwardly the same, their meaning depends on intent and the object of veneration. One venerates God to express the exclusive worship, *latreia*, due to him, but one can venerate things and people to pay them honour. Idolatry is worshipping something other than God, and as icon veneration honours rather than worships it is not idolatrous. More ingeniously, for John “image” refers not just to physical representations, but rather describes key relationships within the Trinity—the Son being the image of the Father—and between God and his creation—man being made in the image of God. Therefore icons, seemingly small in themselves, are elevated by being associated with something fundamental, John deeming an attack on one as an attack on the whole. A similar mentality suffuses John's final defence, that icons are a traditional part of church practice, an argument he attempts to substantiate by a *florilegium* of supporting examples, and to reject this one aspect of tradition was to reject it all.

John's second treatise, written after 730, is a notably simplified version, closer to an attack pamphlet than to a learned theological treatise. Again, the argument from the Incarnation is central, but it is now not only abridged but made explicitly anti-Jewish: Jews are prone to idolatry, but, post-Incarnation, Christians are not, and so they can make icons. This was evidently an attempt to smear the iconoclasts as Judaizing. The second treatise is also more vehemently and explicitly aimed at Leo III, who is roundly abused not just for being an iconoclast but for daring to interfere in ecclesiastical matters at all. John does also argue that God repeatedly made images, and in particular made man in his image.

The final treatise is a much fuller and less impassioned affair. John goes into great detail about the different forms of image and the functions they fulfil.

In this hierarchy, icons occupy a relatively lowly spot, but to reject them was to reject everything. As such, to John making and venerating icons is not just permissible, it is necessary.

As Louth argues, it is hard to evaluate the impact of John of Damascus on Byzantine iconoclasm. There is no evidence that the iconophiles at Nicaea and after knew his works rather than his reputation. His specific arguments were not taken up either at Nicaea or by the 9th-century Byzantine iconophiles. True, John was the first to note the potential significance of Basil of Caesarea's argument that "the honour offered to the image passes over to the archetype [or original]."¹⁷⁴ This would become the central argument at Nicaea II, but whether the idea was gleaned from John is unknown. Yet, his remarkable fourfold anathema at the iconoclast Council of Hieria suggests that the iconoclasts at least knew him for a staunch defender of icons and an ardent critic of the emperors.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, it is notable that after John's treatises the iconoclasts not only evolved their own theology to be based on something more than Old Testament prohibitions, but they did so in a way that might be said to have addressed the argument from the Incarnation by producing a Christological reason why icons were invalid, and giving a very different definition of what makes a true image of Christ. However, the evolution of the iconoclast argument may well have had nothing to do with John.

Whatever the reasons, something did shift in the iconoclast argument in the early 750s. The first new line of attack is anchored in Christology and the idea of circumscription. God is *aperigraptos*, "uncircumscribed", that is without limit and so impossible to depict in a limited way. Christ, as established in previous ecumenical councils, had two natures, human and divine, united in one person and being, *hypostasis*. The combination of these attributes, Constantine claimed, meant that those making images of Christ fell into heresy. Either they depicted only the human, and so separated Christ into two persons, one human the other divine, like the Nestorians, or they were claiming to depict the uncircumscribable divine and making it form one nature with Christ's humanity, thus falling into Monophysitism. Hieria took up this argument, and through its self-proclaimed authority as an ecumenical council declared the making and venerating images of Christ a heresy, as well as idolatry. Iconophiles were thus smeared by association with heresies and made subject to the anti-heresy laws.

¹⁷⁴ Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 45 (PG 32: 67–218, 149C), quoted in John of Damascus, *imag.* I. 35; II. 31; III. 48.

¹⁷⁵ Nicaea, 782.

As Louth notes, this (rather strained) Christology is embedded within a genuinely thoughtful argument about how Christ wanted to be remembered. Instead of an icon made by an artist and unblessed by a priest, Christ had explicitly said that he should be remembered in the blood and wine of the Eucharist, which was administered by priests. This was the true icon of Christ, and one really made without human hands. The only other symbols that were permissible were the cross and the church building itself, the first an ancient and undisputed Christian symbol that had long been associated with the emperor, the second a place consecrated by bishops, run by priests, and where the Eucharist was administered. What distinguishes these true symbols to the iconoclasts from false icons is authority: they had scripture, indisputable tradition, and priestly blessing to back them; icons did not. Moreover, while the cross, Eucharist, and church were forms of the holy that were firmly under ecclesiastical control, icons were not.

While Nicaea II repudiated Hiereia, it did not engage with these ideas in any meaningful way. Rather it proclaimed the truth as it saw it, that icons and icon veneration were a tradition-hallowed part of Orthodox life. The centrepiece in its argument was the statement from Basil that the honour paid to the image passes over to the archetype. Nicaea's novelty lies not in its argument, but on its insistence that icon veneration was not just permissible but necessary. As Louth notes, it fell short of proclaiming images superior to words in Orthodox practice, but it lay the seeds for it.

It is hard to see much of a theological dialogue in the 8th century. Mostly each side seems to be talking, or more accurately shouting, past each other. In part that is due to largely having only the iconophile side of the conversation, but it is also due to the fact that the iconophiles based their case so firmly on tradition and engaged more in polemic and insult than in intellectual persuasion. Not that the iconoclasts were afraid to cast insults as well, labelling their opponents idolaters, heretics, Nestorians, and Monophysites. However, alongside the name-calling, one can discern an evolution in both side's argumentation, especially by the iconoclasts. For the iconophiles, outside of John of Damascus, one sees less the growth in argument than the accumulation of evidence and authority to support their position, in particular the convening of Nicaea II and its dossier of examples designed to demonstrate icons and icon veneration were ancient Christian practices, and to paint the iconoclasts as aberrant innovators following the example of Jews and Muslims. More strikingly, one sees the growth in the proclaimed significance of the icon. From a permissible but secondary item within the panoply of Orthodox worship, icons by the time of Nicaea are proclaimed as necessary and vital.

There is one final aspect we might note. Setting to one side the problem of the sources underreporting the iconoclasts, from what survives the most impressive engagements on the subject took place outside of Byzantium. John of Damascus produced a far more subtle and original defence of icons than Germanos and Nicaea II. And as Richard Price noted in his chapter, the most thorough critique of both sides but particularly of the iconophile position was Theodulf of Orleans' *Libri Carolini*, produced in Frankia and discussed in Tom Noble's chapter. The fire of the iconoclast controversy may well have been hottest within Byzantium, but it might well have shed more heat than light.

3.4.2 The Theological Debate in the Ninth Century

As Ken Parry explains, the theological debate in the 9th century witnessed both considerable continuity and notable changes. As ever, we can say far more about the iconophiles than the iconoclasts, which might be one reason why the iconophile position seems to us to have evolved and become more sophisticated, while the iconoclast arguments look more static. However, this is perhaps better explained by the context. As noted above, the iconophiles had not really engaged in any detailed manner with the arguments propounded by Constantine V and at Hiereia. This would prove a weakness after the return of iconoclasm in 815, driven as it was largely through a mixture of the failures of the iconophile emperors and nostalgic memories of the more successful iconoclasts, especially Constantine V. The iconoclasts, therefore, had little reason to greatly develop their arguments; events on earth, reflecting divine will, had proved them correct. In contrast, the exiled iconophiles Nikephoros and Theodore the Studite had both the time and motivation to create new defences for icons, and to attack the legacy of Constantine.

This is not to say that the iconoclasts did not change at all. Indeed, there is a notable moderation in their rhetoric and actions. The Council of Constantinople in 815 might have rejected Nicaea II and restored Hiereia, declaring the making of images worthless, but it notably stopped short of using the incendiary term idol.¹⁷⁶ Likewise, although it posed the problem of circumscription, it did not explicitly accuse its opponents of being Nestorians or Monophysites. Such moderation is also reflected in the letter of Michael II to Louis the Pious in 824, which explicitly stated that only images near to the ground were removed. Those higher up, which could not so easily attract marks of worship, for example kisses, were allowed to remain. Other practices that made prominent use

176 For the council of 815 we are reliant on the lengthy refutation of it in Nikephoros, *Refutatio et versio*, ed. Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, CCSG 33 (Turnhout: 1997).

of icons in ways that implied icons either were holy or could transmit holiness were also attacked. There is also some evidence that while iconoclasts during Second Iconoclasm were still focused on what made a true image, they were less focused on images of Christ and Christological arguments, and more on the issue of the saints.¹⁷⁷ Rather than spurious and useless icons, true images of the saints were the reproductions of their virtues in living men.

This relative moderation was not matched by the iconophiles, with the deposed patriarch Nikephoros in particular attacking the memory of Constantine V in his various treatises. However, rather than just throwing insults, both Nikephoros and Theodore also directly engaged with the iconoclast arguments. Two aspects of this leap out from Parry's examination. First is the sheer range of arguments employed, so many in fact that there is insufficient space to summarise them here. Second is the increased theological and philosophical sophistication of several of those arguments. Key terms are rigorously analysed, similar in a manner to John of Damascus but very different to Nicaea II. Notably, Nikephoros and Theodore utilised Aristotle, both for a style of logical argument, and for particular arguments about the relationship between image and prototype. This improved erudition reflects the excellent education of Nikephoros and Theodore, which in turn is a reflection of an upturn in the cultural and intellectual life in Byzantium from the latter half of the 8th century onwards. It is ironic that in some ways the Isaurians were victims of their own successes, as the stability of their reigns helped provide the conditions for this upturn and the associated revival of monasteries.

Many of the defences for icons and their veneration were not new, but were rather clarified and given detail. The appeal to unwritten tradition is still central, but new examples are given. Notably references are made not just to texts, but also to images themselves, especially the not-made-by-human-hands images of Christ, which were declared proof that Christ could be depicted and had been depicted since the very beginnings of Christianity. Subject and intent in icon-veneration are still argued to clear the practice of the charge of idolatry. Icons are not idols because they depict real holy beings, rather than imaginary pagan gods. When Christians prostrate themselves they mean different things depending on their intent: they offer worship to God, but only venerate the material image. Icons are useful for teaching, especially the unlettered.

Other arguments directly engaged with the iconoclasts. There is considerable discussion of the terms "circumscribed" and "uncircumscribed". While the incomprehensible Godhead is indeed uncircumscribed, the mystery of the

¹⁷⁷ Alexander, "Iconoclastic Council," 44.

Incarnation is that Christ was circumscribed. Therefore, he could be depicted. If one denied Christ could be depicted one denied an element of his humanity. Indeed, Nikephoros attacked Constantine for inconsistency, for clearly he believed that Christ could be circumscribed into the Eucharist. Theodore argues that the iconoclasts were wrong because they focused on Christ's dual nature, human and divine. But according to Theodore, what an icon of Christ depicts is neither the uncircumscribable divinity nor the circumscribable humanity. Rather it depicts the *hypostasis*, the individual personhood of the Son who took on flesh. As Christ was hypostatically distinct from other individual humans, he had a circumscribable and depictable form.

To counter Constantine's argument that a true image had to be consubstantial with its prototype, Nikephoros and Theodore devote considerable space to discussing the relationship between images and prototypes. Following Aristotle, they argue that images are obviously different from what they depict, but they are united by their relationship. In part, that was because they are united by name. An image of an emperor on a coin differs in substance from the emperor himself, but they are both referred to as emperor; the same applies to the depiction of a holy person. Theodore goes further, declaring that image and prototype are connected by a shared "likeness" and a "likeness of *hypostasis*". This means that an icon of Christ or a saint receives exactly the same level of veneration as Christ and the saint themselves.

As Parry notes, the contemporary defence of icons produced in Syria-Palestine by Theodore Abū Qurrah overlaps considerably with the arguments of the Byzantine iconophiles, but it is also marked by its different context. As a Melkite living in the Caliphate Theodore faced different opponents, namely Jewish and Muslim critics, and those Christians who found them persuasive. Inevitably this meant that idolatry, and especially the Second Commandment, was a bigger part of the debate than it was in contemporary Byzantium, another sign of how matters had evolved within Byzantine iconoclasm. For Theodore, Christians could distinguish between icons and idols as they had been given the gift of grace to tell the difference. Theodore Abū Qurrah, like John of Damascus, with whom he shares many arguments, does not utilise Aristotle, not because he did not know Aristotle but because the relationship between image and prototype was less central to the debate.

When one compares the 9th-century iconophiles with their forebears, perhaps what is most striking is the proclaimed significance of icons. Not only were icons necessary and vital, they were now declared in some ways superior to symbols such as the cross. Unwritten tradition is emphasized over written authorities, images over texts, sight over hearing. This is a long way from Germanos. In the course of intense debate, the defenders of icons had gone

from saying icons were permissible but secondary, to declaring icon veneration a fundamental and central part of Orthodox worship. Likewise, when Byzantine iconoclasm began there was little in the way of a systematic theology of religious imagery. By the end of Second Iconoclasm there was a detailed and thoughtful theological justification for icon veneration and a party of supporters ready to declare icons essential to Orthodoxy.

It would be wrong to claim that the evolution of iconophile theology caused the return to icons in 843. There is no evidence any iconoclast changed their mind after reading Nikephoros or Theodore the Studite. However, the combination of theology, the authority of tradition and the restored status of Nicaea II, and the successive blackwashing of the iconoclasts made any return of iconoclasm virtually inconceivable. Theology may well have lagged practice before iconoclasm by essentially ignoring the issue of religious images, but one could argue that by 843 it was in the vanguard, helping to make the icon a fundamental aspect of Byzantine culture.

3.4.3 The Problem of the Holy: Saints, Relics, and Monks

For all the justifiable scepticism concerning our sources and the extent of physical iconoclasm, few would question that the controversy over religious imagery was the main focus of theological debate in Byzantium in this era. However, just as the struggle over icons was never just about theology, iconoclasm was not the only religious subject in the Byzantine world. Indeed, many of our sources cast the iconoclasts as distinctly more radical, attacking such ancient and well-established Christian practices as the cult of saints, relics, and monasticism. For instance, Theophanes accuses Leo III thus:

Not only was the impious man in error concerning the relative worship of the holy icons, but also concerning the intercession of the all-pure Theotokos and all the saints, and he abominated their relics like his mentors the Arabs.¹⁷⁸

For a long time, the majority of scholarship largely accepted such statements. As such the iconoclasts, or at least some of them, seem remarkably similar to 16th-century Protestants, a connection implicit in much analysis and explicitly made by a few.¹⁷⁹ More recent sceptics would argue that this is part of the problem, that those who make the comparison have misinterpreted what

¹⁷⁸ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 406, trans. Mango and Scott, 561.

¹⁷⁹ Gero, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Failure of a Medieval Reformation."

happened in Byzantium precisely because they have carried with them the baggage of assumptions created by the Reformation, namely that those who rejected religious imagery would be likely to reject saints, relics, and monks as well.

As mentioned already, a more subtle and highly influential argument was made by Peter Brown, who cast iconoclasm as part of a general problem of the holy.¹⁸⁰ Increasingly the Christian world was suffused with holy things like holy men, relics, and icons offering many paths to heaven and divine intercession in terrestrial affairs. Problematically, many of these channels to the divine were outside the direct control of the Church, with icons the most dangerous of all given the fact they could be reproduced virtually *ad infinitum*. For Brown iconoclasm was a centripetal reaction against this dangerously centrifugal force, attempting to draw a dividing line between acceptable forms of the holy, like the Eucharist, and unacceptably uncontrollable forms like icons.

However, with the wave of source criticism has come a gradual chipping away at the arguments that the iconoclasts were also relic-breakers, monk-oppressors, and intercession-sceptics. Much of the evidence is now dismissed as rhetorical, the painting of the iconoclasts in as bad a light as possible. In contrast, evidence for iconoclast support of saints, relics, and monasticism has been produced. Increasingly the iconoclasts have been depicted not as radicals, but as self-professed traditionalists who thought it was the iconophiles who had strayed from the righteous path of tradition by allowing in idolatry in the form of icon worship.

Sifting through these debates and the evidence for us is Dirk Krausmüller. For the great majority of the iconoclast period—more than a century long we should remember—Krausmüller argues that the revisionists make a good argument, at least when it came to the “official” stance of the emperor and most iconoclasts. This is especially clear for Second Iconoclasm, where we find numerous instances of iconoclast support for the cult of saints, relics, and monasticism. Indeed, it is evident that, despite our texts often making monks the premier defenders of images, many monks were iconoclasts. The picture is murkier for First Iconoclasm. As Krausmüller notes, the evidence for Leo III’s reign is so scarce on this matter to make it almost impossible to verify claims like Theophanes’, though what there is would suggest that the dominant strand within iconoclasm accepted the intercession of saints and relics, and had no problem with monasticism. As to the charge that any iconoclasts rejected

180 Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis.” As mentioned above, a very similar argument was independently made by Sebastian Brock, “Iconoclasm and the Monophysites.”

Mary's role as the *Theotokos*, this really does seem like a calumny thrown by the iconophiles to associate their opponents with Nestorians, a canny move given that iconoclasts made the same accusation of any who depicted Christ at the Council of Hieria. Indeed, that council, the most complete and authoritative iconoclast statement we possess, affirms Mary as *Theotokos*, and the cult of the saints and their relics. Overall therefore, the evidence firmly suggests that most iconoclasts for the great majority of the period did not object to saints, relics, and monks.

However, as Krausmüller cogently argues, we should not turn the iconoclasts into a monolithic party. Indeed, to do so would be to accept the polemic of the iconophiles. Rather there was a spectrum of opinion that did include more radical sceptics. Furthermore, the traditional picture of something changing under Constantine V has some foundation. Indeed, in Krausmüller's convincing analysis Constantine embraced the radicals around 765 and supported them for the rest of his reign.

This seems less of a break with tradition, and as such more plausible, when one peels away the exaggerations and distortions of our sources, to rediscover the more limited scope of the "radical party". For instance, Krausmüller essentially concurs with Auzépy's subtle argument that Constantine and his supporters were not anti-relic as such but did want to remove relics from altars and so create a space reserved solely for communion.¹⁸¹ What Krausmüller adds is that there is evidence for attacks on a very specific class of relic: intact corpses that miraculously produced substances like blood. These "pious frauds" include the only specific tale of relic destruction under Constantine V, that of St Euphemia. Instead of a wonton destroyer of relics, in Krausmüller's account Constantine in his later years becomes a considered critic of some excesses.

The more radical sceptics also seem less of a rupture with the past when one appreciates the long tradition of scepticism towards the cult of saints and relics. In particular, recent research has highlighted the long influence of the perfectly theologically coherent theory of the "sleep of the soul," which held that the dead, however holy, could not actively interact with the living world. Such a theology could logically lead to criticism of saintly intercession and the miraculous power of relics, while not necessarily denying the existence of saints or calling for the destruction of relics. This would neatly complement another strand of "iconoclast" thought that has long been recognized, that the saints should be held up as moral exemplars for emulation rather than beseeched

181 Marie-France Auzépy, "Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré: L'église et les reliques," in Michel Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident* (Paris: 2001), 13–24.

for miraculous help.¹⁸² Both adherents of this “ethical theory” of the saints, and proponents of the sleep of the soul—camps that may have overlapped with each other but were not necessarily perfectly aligned—would have recast saints in a way that their opponents could attack as an assault on the cult of saints. It is also perfectly possible that they succeeded in the last decade of Constantine’s reign in having the epithet “holy” removed from saints and the Virgin, and outlawing prayers of intercession directed at the Virgin, saints, and relics. In such an environment it is also entirely imaginable that monasticism was also criticised, and some monks and monasteries attacked.

Three things should be emphasized here. First, the successes of this radical party were relatively minor, if only because they only received imperial backing of any sort for at most a decade. Even though Krausmüller detects scepticism continuing into Second Iconoclasm, it was clearly not the “official” policy of the imperial Church. Second, although there is a logical overlap between sceptics of icons and those of the cult of the saints, relics, and monks, a complex spectrum of beliefs was possible. It is entirely possible for individuals and factions to draw different lines as to what practices were acceptable, and which were not. As such we should be careful about labelling sceptics of saints, relics, and monks as “iconoclasts”, as if they were one and the same group, and that being anti-icon was the principal focus. Third, the existence of these shades of doubt perhaps makes iconoclasm more understandable. Scepticism was always probably more prevalent than our sources would have us believe. Moreover, given the travails the Christian Empire had suffered it is perhaps not surprising that a range of rigorist reformers emerged seeking to win divine favour through purging the Church and God’s Chosen People. The irony is that this prolonged bout of scepticism, whether of icons, saints, relics, or monks would in the long run only succeed in embedding these practices so firmly into Orthodoxy that they became essentially unassailable.

3.5 *Iconoclasm East and West*

Neither debate over religious imagery nor actual iconoclasm was confined to early medieval Byzantium. This is hardly surprising. The question of how and whether to portray the divine is a universal problem, if particularly pressing for religions that believe in a transcendent God who still interacts with the world.¹⁸³ Such debates always have the potential to lead to physical destruction, as do more mundane motives such as vandalism and appropriation of the

182 Milton Anastos, “The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts of 754 and 815,” *DOP* 8 (1954), 151–160.

183 For a long history of iconoclasm, see Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*.

precious materials that are often used for religious imagery. Had this volume been unlimited time and space it could have included comparative chapters on iconoclasm in different time-periods, such as the well-documented multitude of cases during the Protestant Reformation.¹⁸⁴ Perhaps more relevantly, acts of iconoclasm and debates over imagery occurred in the early medieval period outside Byzantium. For instance, mid-9th century Tang China saw an official campaign of persecution directed at Buddhists, Christians, and Zoroastrians which included acts of iconoclasm.¹⁸⁵ Much closer to Byzantium, Christian Armenia saw a brief flurry of destruction and debate, probably in the early 7th century.¹⁸⁶ Across the late antique and early medieval era, a fundamental period in world religious history, one finds an array of different ways of portraying the divine, and debates over how and whether to do so.¹⁸⁷ Byzantium was part of that story, if thanks to vehemency of its iconoclast debate one of the best evidenced, at least when it comes to texts.

However, this final part limits itself to examination of the image question in the two societies that, it could be argued, are most relevant for what happened in Byzantine iconoclasm, namely the Islamic Caliphate and the Latin West. Along with Byzantium, these were the principal inheritors of the Roman world, and it is fascinating to examine how each took that complex inheritance in markedly different directions. By the middle of the 9th century these three heirs of Rome each had their own distinctive religious art and intellectual discourses justifying and debating it.¹⁸⁸

No one would deny that insights into Byzantine iconoclasm can be gleaned by comparing it to events in the Caliphate and the West. What has been contested in recent scholarship is the idea that Byzantine iconoclasm was directly caused or influenced by other iconoclasm or iconophobic movements. In particular, any influence coming from the Caliphate is denied as mere rhetoric designed to blacken the iconoclasts' reputations.¹⁸⁹ This final part does

184 The seminal study for the various waves in 16th-century England remains Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–1580* (2nd ed., London: 2005).

185 For an introduction, see Michael Dalby, "Court Politics in Late T'ang Times," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 11: *Sui and T'ang China, 589–906*, part 1, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: 1979), 561–681, esp. 666–669.

186 Thomas Mathews, "Vrt'anēs K'ert'ol and the Early Theology of Images," *Revue des études arméniennes* 31 (2008–9), 101–26.

187 Elsner, *Empires of Faith in Late Antiquity*.

188 For a broad overview of how these heirs of Rome emerged and competed with each other, see Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (London: 1987).

189 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 105–17.

not address that issue directly. Rather it sets out the debate over images in the Islamic world and the Latin West, and leaves it to the reader to decide whether it is better to view the iconoclast controversy as one interlinked, international phenomenon, or a set of parallel debates that only very occasionally and loosely affected each other.

3.5.1 Images and Iconoclasm in the Caliphate

As Christian Sahner rightly states, Islam is too often erroneously seen as iconoclastic, a view reinforced in modern minds through recent high-profile cases such as the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 or ISIL's activities in Syria and Iraq in 2014–17. This is highly problematic. Bouts of iconoclasm are in reality rare in Islamic history, and figural imagery much more common than usually supposed. A far better description would be that Islam became, and was not necessarily born, iconophobic, especially of figural imagery in sacred contexts.

The Qur'an itself is ambiguous on the subject. While it lacks something as explicit as the Second Commandment, anti-idolatry is one of its central messages. Yet, nothing within it necessitates a rejection of figural imagery per se; it is only idols that are a problem. Indeed, one only needs to cast an eye at the coins minted under the Caliphate to realise that Islam in its earliest days had no obvious problem with figural imagery. Before the 690s, these essentially recycled the iconography of their conquered Byzantine and Persian foes. As Sahner reminds us, Islam inherited by conquest a series of very rich visual cultures, which inevitably affected it. To a large degree, the new rulers legitimized themselves in the eyes of their overwhelmingly non-Muslim subjects by wrapping themselves in preexisting symbols including the prominent use of figural imagery, and there was little to nothing in their core beliefs to stop them from doing so. Even when in the 690s the Caliphs did attempt to create a more explicitly Islamic coinage it still utilised figural imagery, issuing coins depicting the Caliph, or perhaps even Muhammad himself.¹⁹⁰

However, the ground was shifting. The need to create a more explicitly Islamic public sphere was driven by a powerful mixture of international competition, especially with Christian Byzantium; internal competition with the majority non-Muslim population; and civil war within the Caliphate, a war in which every combatant sought to legitimize themselves as the true heir to Muhammad. The result was the emergence of a more exclusive Islam, one which

190 For the suggestion that some of the "Standing Caliph" coins actually represent Muhammad himself, see Robert Hoyland, "Writing the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad: Problems and Sources," *History Compass* 5 (2007), 581–602.

drew very clear boundaries between itself and others, especially Christianity, and expressed its dominance over the public sphere of the Caliphate. By 697 this had led to the creation of new, entirely aniconic coinage, crammed with Arabic inscriptions expressing the central message of Islam: "There is no god but God, He has no associate."

At the same time a new Islamic art was emerging with the first great Muslim monuments, namely the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem erected ca. 691 and the Great Mosque of Damascus completed between 705 and 715. These were sites of huge interconfessional importance, and their construction was an important step in proclaiming the triumph of Islam. In this new monumental, public, Islamic art much was appropriated from the past, including the glittering mosaics that adorned both buildings. What is strikingly absent is the sort of figural imagery that for centuries had been central to Christian art and the religious common sense of the area. Instead, new themes come to the fore that could better articulate the Islamic God and religion, such as beautiful calligraphy proclaiming in Arabic messages from the Qur'an, and vegetal motifs expressing paradise and the bounteousness of creation.¹⁹¹

The positive process that was the creation of Islamic art, which in its selective appropriation and reworking of existing motifs eschewed figural imagery at least in certain contexts, had a negative corollary in attacks on crosses and icons, something that became particularly pronounced following the failure of the 717–18 siege of Constantinople. Such attacks were part of a broader range of anti-Christian measures that sought to claim the public sphere for Islam and to purge it of Christianity, the previously hegemonic culture.

For Sahner this is the setting for the famous and much contested edict of Yazid II. Linked explicitly to Byzantine iconoclasm by both Nicaea II and Theophanes, the whole affair has been dismissed as an iconophile invention by some.¹⁹² However, Sahner demonstrates the large array of independent witnesses for its existence. While much about the edict can be debated, its existence should be accepted. Sahner also convincingly argues that it should be dated to 723, meaning that it was only in force for a year. This along with the limits of all enforcement in the early medieval world is one reason why it had a limited impact. More significantly, it was something of an aberration. After Yazid's death in 724 the official campaign of iconoclasm was abandoned. Hence its very low profile in Arab histories, for whom it just was not that important an event.

191 For an introduction to Islamic art, especially in this formative era, see Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: 1987).

192 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 105–117.

However, it evidently was vividly remembered by several Christian communities. This may well be because it did lead to “iconoclasm” in some churches within Yazid’s immediate powerbase of the Transjordan. Thanks to a few inscriptions providing dates for some floor mosaics, we know that up to ca. 720 figural imagery was a common element in church decoration. Then many of these images were scrambled, but very carefully so. This was not wanton destruction, which has led to the conclusion that it was undertaken by Christians themselves, who for some reason in the 720s decided that figural imagery was no longer permissible in churches. Sahner is careful to say that not all the damage done to the mosaics of this region can or should be attributed to the edict. Some definitely postdate it. Yet Sahner cogently argues the edict did have an effect, and not only in churches but also in synagogues, and Umayyad palaces and bathhouses. Therefore, although it may well be the case that there was an iconophobic party within the churches of Palestine who were behind some of the changes, this was a phenomenon that went beyond one confessional group.

Following the abandonment of Yazid’s organised iconoclasm one finds only very sporadic, small-scale, and unofficial bouts of destruction of crosses and icons. However, it is clear from Christian texts defending the practices of cross and icon veneration from Muslim criticism, typically on the grounds that such practices were idolatrous, that these were considered key practices that distinguished Christians from Muslims (and Jews). Moreover, there gradually emerged from this point on an Islamic legal framework that marginalized the public display of Christian symbols and expressed severe disapproval of all figural imagery of whatever sort, while not necessarily demanding its destruction.

While the pious scholars might have increasingly expressed a marked iconophobia, and justified their stance through arguments particular to Islam, the material evidence reveals the continuing power and presence of figural imagery, at least in certain settings. Both Umayyad and Abbasid palaces were liberally decorated with figural imagery, including such impious subjects as rather scantily clad women, especially common in bathhouses. In palatial, elite, and private settings figural imagery often flourished, despite the condemnation of the scholars. Where figural imagery was absent was in the Muslim religious sphere, something that had become almost coterminous with the caliphal public sphere. In coinage and monuments, Islam had matched its strident anti-idolatry rhetoric by the beginning of the 8th Century, and so stood in marked contrast from Christians both within the Caliphate and in Byzantium. For a portion of the next century and half, some of those Christians also made their religious sphere more aniconic. However, after 843 the contrast returned and to an extent endures to this day.

3.5.2 Iconoclasm, Images, and the West

Our final chapter turns to the West. As Tom Noble tells us, instances of iconoclasm in the early medieval West are incredibly rare; only two are recorded and much remains unclear about them. Yet, several communities in the West did repeatedly if episodically become embroiled with Byzantine iconoclasm. The texts that resulted are useful in casting some light on affairs in Byzantium, however distant and refracted by internal concerns. More significantly, the debate in the West did not merely echo that in Byzantium. Rather, Byzantine iconoclasm provided external stimuli for the papacy and the Franks to engage in their own debates, in the process creating some of the longest and most thorough works on the issue.

The first case of western iconoclasm, enacted by Serenus of Marseilles in his see in ca. 600, is remembered not because it was a major event at the time—as far as we can tell it was a one-off that made very little impact—but because it elicited a response in the form of two letters from Pope Gregory I, whose epithet “the Great” reflects his marked influence on the Latin Church.¹⁹³ What Gregory said was hardly radical. Serenus had apparently removed images from the churches of his see on the grounds that people had been worshipping them. Gregory approved the stance that man-made things, *manufactata*, should not be adored. But religious pictures should not be destroyed, as they could educate those who could not read. This moderate line that images should be neither worshiped nor destroyed, as they were traditional and had a useful if limited set of functions, would be repeated in the West for centuries to come.

The second case is similar if better documented. In ca. 816 Claudius became bishop of Turin and, finding churches full of images being worshipped, began destroying them. Indeed, from the limited amount of his work that survives, Claudius seems a true radical, arguing against relics, the cult of the saints, and pilgrimages.¹⁹⁴ However, he also seems to have been another one-off, and was treated as something of an eccentric to be ignored, until contact with Byzantium in 824 over images prompted the Carolingian court to engage in a more thorough examination of the issue. Claudius, still bishop, died in 827 and the issue seems to have died with him.

Rather than reacting either to home-grown iconoclasts or iconophiles, the vast majority of early medieval writing on images and iconoclasm in the

193 Gregory I the Great, *Registrum Epistularum*, IX. 209 (July 599) and XI. 10 (October 600), ed. Dag Norberg, CCL 140A (Turnhout: 1982), 768, 873–76. For Gregory, see Robert Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge: 1997).

194 *Apologeticum atque Rescriptum Claudii Episcopi adversus Theutmirum abbatem*, Epistola 12, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH, Epistolae 4, Epistolae Karolini Aevi 2* (Berlin: 1895), 610–13.

West was generated as a reaction to events in Byzantium. Indeed, four Latin texts written, or mostly written, in the late 720s or early 730s make mention of Byzantine iconoclasm's earliest phase. The most detailed account is in the *Liber Pontificalis*, the serial biographies of the popes that form the closest thing to an in-house history of the early medieval papacy. This claims that Leo III ordered the removal of all images of saints in churches, which Pope Gregory II refused. The controversy then increased within Byzantium leading to the deposition of Patriarch Germanos. Then in 731 Gregory III convened a synod that condemned the iconoclasts.¹⁹⁵

The three other texts are vaguer. Bede in Northumbria had heard that some were wrongly using the Second Commandment as an injunction against making images.¹⁹⁶ A letter inviting Patriarch Antonius of Grado to the synod of 731 talks about attacks on images in Constantinople.¹⁹⁷ An inscription set up by the Lombard king Liudprand in 729 mentions Leo III being misled by someone into a schism.¹⁹⁸ All four texts can be justifiably queried, and the totality of their information is limited. However, taken together they confirm that some in the West knew that image-sceptics had arisen in Byzantium, and that Leo III was supporting them.

There is then a notable gap in the western evidence, with no direct mention of the image question again until the 760s. As Noble notes, whatever the situation in Byzantium, iconoclasm simply was not a major preoccupation of anyone in the West in these years. Even the reaction in the late 720s and early 730s was rather minor even among those who noticed it, with only the partial exception of the papacy for whom it was important but hardly the most pressing issue.

The subject emerged again in the 760s. While in part this was a delayed reaction to the iconoclast Council of Hieria in 754, the fact that more than a decade passed before any western reaction is recorded is a sign that other factors were at play. In particular, the Franks, the rising power in the West, were increasingly being drawn into the complex political arena of Italy. Both

195 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris: 1886–92), 91.17, 23–24, 92.2–4. For an introduction to the early medieval papacy, see Tom Noble, *The Republic of St Peter: The Birth of the Papal State 680–825* (Philadelphia: 1984).

196 Bede, *De templo*, 2. 19. 10, ed. David Hurst, *CCCM* 119A (Turnhout: 1969), 212. For further analysis, see Peter Darby, “Bede, Iconoclasm and the Temple of Solomon,” *Early Medieval Europe* 21 (2013), 390–421.

197 *Epistolae Langobardicae Collectae*, no. 13, ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH, Epistolae* 3, *Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi* 1 (Berlin: 1892), 703.

198 Francesca Dell’Acqua and Clemens Gantner, “Resenting Iconoclasm: Its Early Reception in Italy through an Inscription from Cortelona,” *Medieval Worlds* 9 (2019), 160–86.

Constantine v and the papacy courted the Carolingian King Pippin, but in the end the Franks decided to double-down on their alliance with Rome. As such in 767 the Franks held a synod at Gentilly, at which images were one of the issues debated, with the Roman position declared correct. Another synod took place in Rome in 769 that condemned Hiereia and declared that images could be venerated. However, as Noble makes clear most of the synod was concerned with other matters.

Once more the topic disappears, until Irene invited Pope Hadrian I to send representatives to Nicaea II. Hadrian did along with a long letter drawing upon materials compiled in 731 and 769 that recycled many of the traditional arguments for images, but also wrapped the issue up with papal authority. For Hadrian, Leo III and Constantine v had fallen into heresy by failing to adhere to papal teaching. While Nicaea politely ignored this point, its “restoration” of icon veneration was fully supported by Hadrian.

A very different response came from the Frankish court. To the Franks Nicaea went much too far when it not only defended icon veneration but declared it a necessary element of Christian worship. Moreover, it seems that the Franks received a defective Latin translation of Nicaea’s *acta* that made the council’s support for images even more strident than it actually was. Charlemagne set one of his court scholars, Theodulf of Orleans, the task of repudiating the “Greek” heresy. The result was the *Libri Carolini*, more properly entitled the *Opus Caroli*.¹⁹⁹ Even in its unfinished state, this work is one of the most impressive and detailed pieces of theology produced anywhere in the period on the subject of images in Christian worship. Theodulf continued the line that images were permissible and should neither be destroyed nor adored. However, he envisages a more limited role for them than Gregory. Images could decorate and commemorate, but not teach.

As Noble notes, there is a certain irony in Theodulf’s austere view of religious art, for it was precisely at this moment that the Carolingian world started generating massive quantities of high-quality religious material culture.²⁰⁰ Nor was Frankish religious art limited to high-status items such as spectacular gospels that only a few would have seen. Though evidence is limited, it seems churches in the Frankish world were usually decorated with figural imagery, though there is no evidence of any organised cult of images. Evidently a limited theological role for images did not preclude their ubiquity.

199 *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (Libri Carolini)*, eds. Ann Freeman with Paul Meyvaert, *MGH, Concilia*, Tomus II, Supplementum I (Hanover: 1998).

200 For an introduction to early medieval western art including the Carolingians, see Lawrence Nees, *Early Medieval Art* (Oxford: 2002).

While the *Libri Carolini* promoted a moderate course, it included a stinging attack on the Byzantines for veering from one extreme to another. Indeed, as much as it reveals about Frankish ideas on religious art, it illuminates more the developing notions in Carolingian ideology that proclaimed the Franks, not the Byzantines, were the true Christian empire and heirs of Rome.²⁰¹ Like in Byzantium, the image question was never just about images, and often was not even mainly about images.

Theodulf never finished his work. A keystone in Carolingian ideology was the alliance with the papacy, and it seems as if the Franks were unaware of Hadrian's support for Nicaea. Hence they sent an early copy of the *Libri Carolini* to Hadrian for his comments, and were shocked by his detailed and angry response. To save face, the project was pulled. Instead, at the Council of Frankfurt in 794 Nicaea was condemned for anathematizing those who did not give the same level of adoration to images as they did to the Trinity, something Nicaea does not actually say.

The return of Byzantine iconoclasm in 815 is markedly absent from any western account. Then in 824 a letter was sent by Michael II to Louis the Pious. The first two-thirds are an account of recent Byzantine politics, and only the last third turns to the issue of images. As noted above, it spells out the relatively moderate actions undertaken to prevent illicit practices involving icons. In response, Louis tasked a small number of key advisers and theologians to consider the issue. The result was presented at a meeting in Paris in 825. The moderate line that images should be neither destroyed nor adored was affirmed. Notably, however, the text eschews anti-Byzantine rhetoric. The contemporaneous controversy around Claudius also led to the creation of two lengthy treatises refuting his arguments, and a smattering of other writers also engaged in the image question.

Overall, it is evident that the image debate in the West was even more of an episodic affair than in Byzantium and was frequently secondary to other matters. Yet despite being of relatively marginal significance, the resultant textual corpus on the subject is impressively large and frequently sophisticated, testament to a large degree to the intellectual vitality of the Carolingian world. Events in Byzantium might have been the principal driver, but the resultant works reflect western concerns. Moreover, while a distinction can be discerned between the papacy and the Franks, with the former consistent supporters of the iconophiles and notable for their patronage of icons, both shared a

201 For an introduction to the Carolingians, see Marios Costambeys, Matthew Innes, and Simon MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge: 2011).

common theological line: images should neither be destroyed nor worshipped; after all they were only images.

Centuries later Catholic Christendom would develop a cult of images, but even then icons never became either in practice or theologically as central as they were in Byzantium. That difference emerged thanks to Byzantine iconoclasm radicalising the significance of the icon in Byzantium. As such icons were another in a growing list of differences piling up that distinguished the Roman Catholic Church from the Eastern Orthodox.²⁰² However, other differences were sharper and felt more keenly, from the issue of clerical marriage to the authority of the pope. Two distinct religious cultures were emerging, with different theologies and practices attached to religious images. The process began before Byzantine iconoclasm, and was not complete after it, but the “Iconoclast Era” was a crucial period in which the divisions deepened.

3.6 *The Aftermath*

There are no full stops in history. Just as it is always something of an arbitrary exercise in declaring when something began, one should be wary of pointing to a definitive end point. As such, it is a perfectly legitimate criticism that, apart from brief mentions in the chapters by Price and Noble, this volume does end with the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843. By doing so perhaps we have implicitly bought into the carefully constructed narrative of the iconophiles. Yet volumes must end somewhere and that event, which Auzépy reminds us in her chapter is shrouded in obscurity, did mark a decisive turning point. True the issue was raised again during the Photian Schism, the controversy over the canonically dubious raising of Photios to the patriarchate in 858.²⁰³ However, as Price notes this was almost certainly not a reflection of any lingering strength of the iconoclast party. Rather it suited several different actors to burnish their Orthodox credentials by repudiating the recent heresy. As a debate iconoclasm was dead. However, as a symbolic enemy whose defeat helped define Orthodoxy, iconoclasm had become vital.

Why did iconoclasm not return as a real debate after 843? One reason must be the construction of a very extensive armoury of theological defences and supporting evidence. Every one of the iconoclast points had been given an answer. More than that, a plethora of detailed arguments had been provided that declared icon-veneration not only permissible but necessary. Those

202 For an overview of the emerging differences, see Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681–1071* (Crestwood, NY: 2007).

203 The classic account remains Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend* (Cambridge: 1948).

arguments were supported by a daunting array of authorities. An ecumenical council had declared icon veneration part of the official dogma of the Church. Citations from Scripture and the Fathers were marshalled to support it. Ancient texts proved its antiquity. While we may legitimately question every aspect of this defence, one must acknowledge that to anyone arguing from within the established beliefs and structures of Byzantine Orthodoxy post-843 this was a formidable defence.

As important, however, was the progressive rewriting of the Iconoclast Era. By turning the struggle into an epic of destruction, persecution, and resistance, the iconophiles created a new cast of Orthodox heroes to be emulated and heretical villains to be condemned. The struggle was embedded into the living history of Byzantium and the Orthodox faith, remembered every time these texts were read, icons were paraded, or the Feast of Orthodoxy celebrated. Icons and icon veneration were accepted as ancient practices, and the iconoclasts condemned as perverse aberrations, cultural terrorists who attacked the foundations of Orthodoxy. Given such a thick layering of invective, it would have been incredibly difficult for any iconoclast argument to receive a fair hearing. In particular, no emperor would have wished to be associated with the memory of Constantine V, whose very bones were disinterred and burnt under Michael III.²⁰⁴ The iconophiles were not only ruthless in their rhetoric. Unlike the readmission of iconoclasts in 787, sometime after 843 there was a large-scale purge of suspected iconoclasts from the Byzantine Church.

Only a major external shock could have shaken this quickly solidifying position. However, Byzantium was about to enter its medieval apogee. There simply was no evidence that God was angry, and indeed much to say that he was pleased with the situation after 843. It would not be until the latter half of the 11th century that real disaster again struck, and well before then icons and icon-veneration had become an indispensable part of Byzantine culture and Orthodox worship.

What impact did iconoclasm have? Matters are clearest in the field of theology. While elements of the debate had existed since the time of the Old Testament, before Byzantine iconoclasm the appropriateness of Christian images and their place in worship had not been a major factor in Christian debate. Thanks to iconoclasm the subject joined the rank of issues worthy of an ecumenical council and numerous theological tracts. Indeed, we should note the iconophile position after 843 was far more extreme than that of Germanos

204 Philip Grierson, "The Tombs and Obits of the Byzantine Emperors (337–1042)," *DOP* 16 (1962), 1–63, 53–54.

at the controversy's origins. A Church that had prioritized the word, now declared the image co-equal, and even superior. What had been a permissible but, relative to the cults of relics and the cross, a relatively recent and less significant practice had been turned into a fundamental and necessary one.

While this vital theological significance was embedded in the liturgy of the Feast of Orthodoxy as early as 843, it took time for icons to reach the centrality in public worship they now enjoy. Notably the iconostasis, the wooden screen separating the altar from the nave and covered with icons, only emerged in the 11th century. However, the combination of the proclaimed centrality of the icon and the vivid story of the controversy inevitably encouraged patrons of all kinds to support the manufacture and installation of icons.²⁰⁵ Already in 843 a bust of Christ was returned to the coinage.²⁰⁶ In 867 a mosaic of the Virgin and Child was unveiled in the apse of Hagia Sophia, an event celebrated in a homily delivered by Photios.²⁰⁷ The essentially aniconic cathedral was thereby transformed into a fitting monument for an iconophile Church. Gradually most, though not all, existing churches were transformed. Presumably the active encouragement of the Church and the ever-increasing numbers of icons encouraged the widespread use of icons as tools of personal devotion, though precisely how quickly and thoroughly this happened we do not know, just as we cannot be sure just how common this was both before and during iconoclasm.

The iconoclast debate also influenced the style of icons produced. As one of the points in dispute was the extent to which an icon actually reflected the likeness of the person depicted rather than the whims of the artist, and the related question of how the viewer could know who was represented, after 843 images became regularised. One portrait of St George came to look much like any other. It was also named, for as Aristotle had argued one thing that linked an image with its subject was that they shared a name.²⁰⁸

The story of iconoclasm, however fabricated, had several other effects on Byzantine society. By valorising the monks as the champions of Orthodoxy it boosted the prestige of monasticism and contributed to its continued revival. More surprisingly, the patriarchate emerged strengthened.²⁰⁹ Through the

205 For Byzantine art after iconoclasm, see Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (London: 1985), 141–78, and idem, *Byzantine Art*, 105–42.

206 *DOC* 3.1, 454–58, 461–64.

207 Photios, *Homilies*, ed. B. Laourdas (Thessalonica: 1957), 17.

208 Brubaker, *Inventing*, 116–17.

209 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 223–47; Dimitri Afinogenov, “Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐπίσκοπον ἔχει, The Rise of the Patriarchal Power in Byzantium from Nicaenum II to Epanagoga, Part I: From Nicaenum II to the Second Outbreak of Iconoclasm,” *Erytheia* 15 (1994), 45–65, and idem, “Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐπίσκοπον ἔχει, The Rise of the Patriarchal Power in Byzantium

rewriting of history Germanos became a heroic resistor, the precursor to Tarasios who restored icons. Then Nikephoros, more historically accurately, repeated the process, before Methodios completed the cycle.

What really strengthen their hands, however, was the greater demarcation of the role of the emperor in the Church. While Leo III and Constantine V may have thought they were doing little more than their duty in upholding Orthodoxy, treading a path laid by Constantine I and Justinian I, the condemnation of their excessive interference drew lines that it was very dangerous for future emperors to cross. The emperor might well be God's chosen ruler and protector of the Church, but he was most certainly not a priest, and he had no role in the definition of Orthodoxy. Of course, this did not stop emperor and Church being ideologically and practically intermeshed, but the relationship had changed.²¹⁰

Imperial ideology and wider Byzantine culture were also impacted. In particular, the role and salience of the Old Testament changed. The literalism of the iconoclasts, most obvious in their reading of the Second Commandment, was held up forever after as how not to interpret the Old Testament. By being so literal the iconoclasts had become Jews not Christians, who should approach the text always through the new reality of the Incarnation and read the Old as a prefiguration of the truth in the New Testament.²¹¹ Likewise, while the identification of the Byzantines with the Chosen People did not disappear, the distinction between them and the old Israel was more marked. Emperors still modelled their reigns on figures such as David or were legislators in the mould of Moses and Solomon. Yet the Isaurians' overwhelming focus on the Old Testament faded, and emperors were more associated with Christ than the Old Testament kings. Older imperial discourses and histories reemerged. Notably the classical and late antique pasts and their more explicitly Roman identity were reemphasised, both as a response to the arguments within iconoclasm but also to the emergence of a western Roman Christian empire.²¹²

Throughout this *Companion* there is a stress to see Byzantine iconoclasm in context. On several occasions, contributors note the problems in naming this period the "Iconoclast Era," as this serves both to distort the contemporary

from Nicaenum II to Epanagoga, Part II: From the Second Outbreak of Iconoclasm to the Death of Methodios," *Erytheia* 17 (1996), 43–71.

210 Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, 158–219.

211 Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson, "Introduction," in Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson (eds.), *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: 2010), 1–38.

212 Ševčenko, "The Search for the Past around the Year 800"; Magdalino, "The Distance of the Past."

importance of the controversy and the extent of destruction. Indeed, the Byzantines themselves spoke rather of the “iconomachy”, the struggle over images, which is probably a more apt term. Yet thanks to the iconophiles, the period did become in the historical imagination of the Byzantines and Orthodox about the war over icons. Iconoclasm transformed the identity of Byzantines and the Orthodox, if more after the controversy than during it. Thanks to iconoclasm Byzantium and Orthodox Christianity embraced the icon, something that served to set them apart from Latin Christianity. To conclude then, during the iconoclast controversy, iconoclasm was just one strand among many in a complicated and critical period. At the same time, it did more than anything else in this era of profound change to transform Byzantium and Orthodox Christianity in the long run.

PART 1

Images before Iconoclasm



Figural Images in Christian Thought and Practice before ca. 500

Robin M. Jensen

1 Modern Scholarship and the Lack of Early Christian Art

The first clearly identifiable examples of Christian pictorial art date from the beginning of the 3rd century. Although rare exceptions have sometimes been dated to the second century, the lack of earlier evidence has led art historians to conclude either that earlier artifacts with discernable Christian iconography have been lost or—more likely—simply were not produced. Because the latter conclusion has warranted some explanation, generations of historians have theorized about why this should be the case, especially in light of the large number of painted and sculpted images that adorned 4th- and 5th-century church walls, liturgical vessels, vestments, reliquaries, coffins for burial, and items used for private devotion. Among the most common proposals is that 1st- and 2nd-century Christians were adamantly opposed to all pictorial art on the basis of biblical injunctions against graven images or that they regarded material possessions as being of little value while they awaited the expected imminent return of Christ.¹

One of the earliest scholars to address the Christian “image question” was Hugo Koch, a German Catholic church historian and a follower of Adolf von Harnack. Writing in the early 20th-century, Koch was convinced that the lack of surviving artifacts demonstrated that ancient Christians were utterly opposed to figural imagery because they scrupulously observed the biblical injunctions against graven images.² Koch’s perspective was widely shared in subsequent

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- 1 A third proposal, that early Christians lacked the economic means and political security that would encourage the production and purchase of material possessions, is not treated here. Although possible, it would be impossible to establish by surviving textual or physical evidence.
 - 2 Hugo Koch, *Die altchristliche Bilderfrage nach den literarischen Quellen* (Göttingen: 1917). Prior to Koch, and generally taking the same position, was Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende* (Leipzig: 1899).

decades.³ Theologian Edwyn Bevan, who delivered the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh in the 1930s (and published them in 1940), acknowledged his debt to Koch, asserting Christians only began producing visual art once they became separated from their Jewish origins and more fully assimilated into a pagan cultural context.⁴ Thirty years later, Henry Chadwick, in his brief history of early Christianity stated: "The second of the Ten Commandments forbade the making of any graven images. Both Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria regarded this prohibition as absolute and binding on Christians. Image and cultic statues belonged to the world of paganism."⁵ Chadwick's statement was echoed by art historian Robert Grigg ten years later, in the opening two lines of an essay which bluntly stated: "It is well known that the spokesmen for the early Christian church were hostile to religious images. They regarded the Old Testament prohibition against images (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8) as binding upon Christians."⁶

Many other distinguished art historians concurred with this basic explanation, from Ernst Kitzinger and Norman Baynes in the 1950s to James Breckenridge in the 1970s, and Hans Belting in the 1990s.⁷ For example, Hans Belting asserted that "in the beginning, the Christian religion did not allow for any concession in its total rejection of the religious image," and offered the fact that "religious images were in open contradiction to the Mosaic law of the

3 For example, Walter Elliger, *Die Stellung der alten Christen zu den Bildern in den ersten vier Jahrhunderten (nach den Angaben der zeitgenössischen kirchlichen Schriftsteller)* (Leipzig: 1930).

4 Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image-Worship in Ancient Paganism and Christianity* (London: 1940), 84–85.

5 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: 1967), 277.

6 Robert Grigg, "Aniconic Worship and the Apologetic Tradition: A Note on Canon 36 of the Council of Elvira," *Church History* 45 (1976), 428–33 (quoting from page 428). Grigg's first footnote (at the end of the first sentence quoted above) credits Koch's *Die altchristliche Bilderfrage* as an "indispensable study."

7 Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150; Norman Baynes, "Idolatry and the Early Church," in *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: 1955), 116–43; James Breckenridge, "The Reception of Art into the Early Church," *Atti IX Congresso Internazionale di Archeologia Cristiana*, vol. 1 (1978), 361–69; and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: The History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: 1994). Another prominent scholar, Theodor Klauser, amassed archeological evidence for early Christian aniconism and texts from early Christian writers against polytheistic idolatry in a series of collected essays titled "Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der christlichen Kunst," in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* vols 1 (1958), 20–51; 2 (1959), 115–45; 3 (1960), 112–33; 4 (1961), 128–45; 5 (1962), 113–24; 6 (1963), 71–100; 7 (1964), 67–76; 8–9 (1965–6), 126–70; 10 (1967), 82–100. For an excellent summary (and biting critique) of the modern history of interpretation see Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God* (Oxford: 1994), 7–10 and 99–104.

ancient Jews” as an overriding reason for their anti-image stance. The church’s eventual acceptance of images, Belting asserts, was “an unexpected change from very early and very important convictions.”⁸

Whereas Koch, Chadwick, and others credited the lack of Christian art to early believers’ adoption of the Second Commandment, other scholars attributed it to their faith’s supposed anti-material, otherworldly outlook. Kitzinger, perhaps the most respected Byzantine art historians of his generation, opined that “Christianity’s original aversion to the visual arts was rooted in its spirituality,” and to this end cited the text from the Gospel of John which claims that since God is Spirit, true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23).⁹ Kitzinger maintained that Christianity’s aversion to the visual arts was “part and parcel of a general rejection of material props in religious life and worship.”¹⁰

More significantly, although Kitzinger links this “radical rejection” of images to a Christian anti-material outlook, he also points to the role that cult statues traditionally played in Greco-Roman paganism. Significantly, this allowed him to differentiate various kinds of art, noting that some types of representations—symbolic or decorative devices and narrative images—were deemed “relatively harmless.”¹¹ Kitzinger’s “harmless art” included the early catacomb paintings that incorporated simple signs like doves, anchors, or grapevines, or those based on biblical narratives, which he judged to be essentially didactic and not particularly devotional in nature. Thus, an often-observed but important distinction is acknowledged between all types of figurative imagery and cultic or devotional images, first of pagan gods and then of Christian divine beings as well as holy men and women (e.g., Christ, the apostles, and the saints). The continued rejection of sculpture in the round, even after the acceptance of two-dimensional devotional portraits for adorning public liturgical spaces as well as aiding private prayer is significant. Presumably, statues were too similar to pagan cult images and so generally were avoided as objects of veneration.¹²

These explanations, that Christians were observant of Hebrew Bible commandments or that they were spiritually disengaged from material props in

8 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 144. For an earlier example, see Margaret Frazer, “Iconic Representations,” in Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *The Age of Spirituality* (New York: 1979), 513–16, 513: “In the first centuries following Christ’s death, Christians in accordance with their Jewish heritage, did not use religious images as a means of proselytizing their young religion.”

9 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 88–89.

10 *Ibid.*, 89.

11 *Ibid.*, 89.

12 See discussion of sculpture in the round below, and references in footnote 65.

their religious practices, are theologically-grounded or ritual-based explanations for the absence of early and identifiably Christian artworks. Yet, not only the lack of evidence in the first two centuries, but also the emergence of Christian art in the 3rd and 4th centuries requires an explanation. Thus, earlier historians offered corresponding reasons for the eventual emergence of visual culture. They either assumed a softening of discipline, a lack of proper spiritual formation, separation from their Jewish roots and assimilation into the surrounding pagan culture, or a rapidly expanding community that welcomed (or tolerated) merely nominal converts. James Breckenridge expounded a typical view: "The expansion of Christian art in the later third century was not the result of a change in the attitude of the Church toward religious images, but of the enfeeblement of its ability to enforce its rules." He added that, by the early 4th century, it was impossible to stem the wave of popular practices "in view of the mountainous wave of new converts from idolatrous paganism following the Edict of Toleration."¹³

During the last decades of the 20th century, scholars began to challenge these judgments. Among these were Sister Mary Charles Murray, whose seminal 1977 article was supported and advanced by the influential work of Paul Corby Finney in 1994.¹⁴ Charles Murray forcefully criticized the prevailing view of early Christians as monolithically hostile to images. She pointed out that Christian apologists seldom condemned images specifically on the basis of biblical injunctions, possibly because their intended audience of non-Christians was unlearned in Christian holy texts. Rather than cite their own scriptures, they regularly called upon philosophically informed distrust of figural images.¹⁵ On this point, Charles Murray convincingly refuted those earlier scholars who consistently had maintained the importance of the Mosaic Decalogue in Christian condemnation of graven images.¹⁶ Moreover, following historian Robert Grant, Charles Murray not only contended that the Jewish Law was not particularly relevant to most 2nd- and 3rd-century Christians, but noted that when occasional references to the Mosaic commandments appeared in the early sources, these scholars tended to misunderstand their point or context.

13 See Breckenridge, "The Reception of Art into the Early Church," esp. 368.

14 Mary Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1977), 303–45; Finney, *The Invisible God*.

15 On the theologically diminished role of the so-called Ten Commandments in early Christian literature see Robert Grant, "The Decalogue in Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 40 (1947), 1–17. On the citations of philosophers, see below.

16 Charles Murray, "Art in the Early Church," 307–8.

Charles Murray also insisted that these historians' presumptions about supposed Jewish aniconism in the early Christian era were clearly challenged by contemporaneous archeological evidence of Jewish pictorial art. In her words, "It becomes clear that in the early Christian period, the prohibition was regarded in contemporary Jewish circles as definitely modified, while by Christians it was regarded as irrelevant save in matters of Old Testament exegesis."¹⁷

Finney's work continued and advanced Charles Murray's. He revealed Adolf von Harnack's influence on scholars like Hugo Koch and by meticulously refuting the entrenched characterization of an increasingly Hellenized Christianity in the 3rd and 4th centuries, Finney revealed an unconscious bias in these historians' work.¹⁸ Soon more scholars joined in to offer alternative explanations for the apparent late emergence of Christian material culture, some citing the gradual attainment of economic and social stability, others questioning whether the categories of "Christian" and "pagan" were even applicable (or even appropriate) to material culture in the early centuries.¹⁹ This next wave of scholarly analysis was, thus, far less theological or even ritually-focused in its approach.

Nearly all these scholars have conceded that although early Christians never actually objected to pictorial art as such, surviving literary evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that their spokespersons were extremely hostile to the veneration of pagan cult images. Thus, with very few exceptions, early Christian opposition to pictorial art was aimed at a specific type of image: depictions of divine beings and, in particular, representations of the Greco-Roman deities. Thus, Kitlinger's crucial distinction between "harmless" symbolic or narrative art and "harmful" cult images is necessary to understanding early Christian attitudes toward visual art, because they were concerned only with non-Christian religious art, rather than images made by or for Christian edification, decoration, or devotional use. The internal criticism of Christian figurative images did not commence until Christians began to make their own sacred icons depicting holy persons (saints) as well as Christ.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., 311.

¹⁸ Finney, *Invisible God*, 7–10.

¹⁹ Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: 2000), 13–15; Jaś Elsner, "Archaeologies and Agendas: Reflections on Late Ancient Jewish Art and Early Christian Art," *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003), 114–28.

²⁰ This is a central thesis of Robin Jensen, *Face to Face: The Image of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: 2005).

Furthermore, the fundamental problem early Christian critics identified aimed less at the simple existence of iconic statues or paintings of the gods than on the ways viewers treated those objects. In other words, they identified idolatry with ritual actions more than with the objects themselves. Therefore, not every image necessarily was an idol, but primarily those insensate items made by human hands out of wood, clay, metal, or other materials that, they claimed, polytheists mistook for sentient beings and which they bowed down to in prayer, made offerings and sacrifices, kissed and anointed, carried to the circus and baths, or served in any number of other ways. Even though early Christian critics generally viewed the statues as both inert and benign and judged the reverence shown to them as simply the ludicrous behavior of naïve simpletons, some also claimed that demons tended to inhabit statues along with the mice who made their nests in them. These demons thereby claimed the names, images, and even the personae of the gods in order to deceive the unaware devotees and do them harm.²¹

1.1 *Second- and Third-Century Christian Objections to Images and Idols*

The extant literary record of writings against images shows that most of early Christian criticism was aimed at images of traditional Greco-Roman deities that would have been objects used for veneration in various religious rituals (e.g., prayers, sacrifices, or votive offerings). Some documentary evidence supports the scholars who draw parallels between occasional references to early Christian images and pagan practices. A case in point comes from the anti-heresy treatise of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (ca. 175), who complained that a certain gnostic sect (the Carpocratians) possessed images of philosophers, including one of Christ made from life by Pontius Pilate. According to Irenaeus, the Carpocratians treated this, like the other portraits, in the same way that polytheists customarily venerated idols—by offering them garlands and lit tapers.²² This report is echoed in an interesting, if historically unreliable, report, contained in the *Historia Augusta*, that the Emperor Severus Alexander's (208–235) private *lararium* displayed statues of gods, heroes, and philosophers, including Orpheus, Alexander the Great, Plato, Cicero, the biblical patriarch Abraham, and Jesus Christ.²³

21 The demonic habitation of images is discussed below.

22 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. and French trans. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon, Contre les hérésies* (Paris: 1969–82), 1.25.6.

23 *Historia Augusta*, trans. David Magie (Loeb Classical Library) 139–40, 263 (Cambridge, MA: 1921–32), *Severus Alexander* 29.2–3; 31.4. Regarding the disputed questions of date and authorship of this collection of imperial bibliographies, see Ronald Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford: 1968); Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of*

Another reported instance concerns the veneration of a saint's image. A brief episode in the fragmentary apocryphal *Acts of John* (usually dated to the mid-2nd or early 3rd century) recounts the story of a certain Lycomedes, praetor of the Ephesians, who was miraculously healed by John.²⁴ To express his gratitude, Lycomedes commissioned a portrait of that apostle to be made without his awareness. Once finished, he placed John's image on an altar in his bedroom so that he could pay it homage in private. He treated it in much the same way as he would have a cult image of Apollo—by placing lit lamps before it and draping garlands upon it. When John asked why Lycomedes seemed to be praying apart from the rest of the community, Lycomedes showed him the painting. Initially, John did not realize it was a portrait of himself (for he had never seen his own face) and asked whether it was an image of one of the gods and accused Lycomedes of still behaving like a pagan idolater. Lycomedes explained that it did, indeed, depict John, and that although he worshipped only God, he regarded John as next to God, insofar as he had raised him from death. This was why he crowned and revered his image.

John quickly reproached Lycomedes, but rather than correcting his mistaken theology, John scolded Lycomedes for having obtained his portrait at all and asserted that it could not possibly portray him accurately. After being offered a mirror so that he could judge the resemblance, John explained that even though the image might resemble his external appearance, it could not be a true likeness. While the picture might show what was visible to the eye, it could not depict his soul or character. Such an image, John explained, is immature and imperfect, a record of a transitory and superficial appearance: merely a dead likeness of the dead.

Beyond these examples of concern over portrait images, texts that have come down to us from the 2nd and 3rd centuries rarely contain general denunciation of figurative or pictorial art. Instead, early Christian theologians tended to focus on what they regarded as the idolatrous veneration of statues or painted images of the polytheistic gods. They perceived what they deemed an alleged confusion of material objects with divine beings, so that works of art

Rome (Oxford: 2011), 743–82; and, more recently, Justin Stover and Mike Kestemont, “The Authorship of the *Historia Augusta*: Two New Computational Studies,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* (2016), 140–57, which more or less concur with Syme's original assessment that the text should be dated to the late fourth century (ca. 395) and assigned to a single author.

24 *Acts of John*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols (rev. ed. Cambridge: 1991–92), vol. 2, 152–209, 26–29. On the dating of this document see Janet E. Spittler, “Acts of John,” in the *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (online).

made by human hands from wood, stone, or metal were believed to be worthy of the homage or honors that devotees paid to them.

Moreover, although recent scholarship has noted the lack of early theological critique of pictorial art generally and argued that Christians were far less iconophobic than once assumed, certain key aspects of the early Christian criticism of Greco-Roman cult images especially deserve to be highlighted. Among these is the insistence that the incomprehensible and incorporeal divine being is utterly beyond conception and thereby impossible to render in visible forms. Furthermore, human-made objects constructed from base materials are incapable of embodying or mediating the divine presence. Being essentially nothing in themselves, insofar as they were fabricated from base materials, cult images were complicit in directing the worshipers gaze to themselves, and away from the transcendent and invisible deity. Those who made them were culpable and those who used them were profoundly misguided. These points were elaborated by numerous 2nd- and 3rd-century Christian authors, including Justin Martyr, the anonymous author of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons, Athenagoras of Athens, Tertullian of Carthage, Marcus Minucius Felix, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, and Origen of Alexandria.²⁵

The earliest of these, Justin Martyr (d. 165), framed his objections within his *First Apology*, addressed to a non-Christian audience, which he assumed to be engaged in practices that he regarded as idolatrous. To a large degree, his work defined the terms of the debate over images that would become more or less traditional among those who followed him. He begins by insisting that the depictions of deities as found in shrines and temples lack souls or life, but that they actually are possessed by demons who have taken their names and forms in order to deceive those who pay them honors. Although he does not explicitly cite the Ten Commandments, he cites other Hebrew Scriptures (Isa 44:9–10; Jer 10:3) as he ridicules the fabrication of images from base materials and calling them gods. He adds that the artisans who do this are undoubtedly immoral and corrupt, which only makes their products even more contemptible. Turning to an explanation of Christian practices, he insists that God has

25 More focused analyses of Christian apologists' writings on the subject of images are included in Finney, *Invisible God* and Moshe Barasch, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: 1992). See also Steven Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes Toward Images* (Rollinsford, NH: 2004). Brief outlines are included in Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: 2000).

no visible form, nor does he need the kinds of honors that traditionally are offered to idols.²⁶

Similarly, Clement of Alexandria (150–215) asserts the folly of idol worship, claiming it attributes the qualities of infinite divinity to mere objects made from base materials. In his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, Clement ridicules those who set up blocks of wood or pillars of stone along with gods' images made in human form and includes a rare citation of the biblical prohibition of making graven likenesses of anything in heaven or on earth.²⁷ Here, however, he evidently attacks representational art more generally, describing it in Platonic terms as imitative at best and deceptive at worst.²⁸ In his treatise, *The Stromata*, Clement again cites the *Decalogue* and reiterates his objections to giving homage to sensible objects even as he also refers to classical philosophers to assert that it is better to pursue intellectual knowledge rather than relying upon what can be seen.²⁹ Yet, despite his invocation of those ancient sages, Clement regards biblical teaching on images as more ancient than that of Plato or Pythagoras since they actually derived them from the teachings of Moses.³⁰

Elsewhere in *The Stromata*, Clement cites the commandment against theft rather than the prohibition of graven images and denounces those who make images, because they steal God's prerogative as singular creator.³¹ Yet, Clement evidently had to deny that even God, who prohibited graven images, could ever have ordered Moses to make two golden cherubim to guard the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 25:18–21). These, he decides, were merely allegorical figures whose features were mystical references to the rational soul and its spiritual repose.³²

Clement's follower, Origen (184–253), held similar views, but his strong biblical approach took him in a slightly different direction. Citing the text from Romans 1, in which Paul declares that God's wrath will be visited upon those who worship images of humans, animals, or reptiles, Origen condemns anthropomorphizing depictions of God. Intent on correcting misguided readings of the Genesis creation story, which declares humans to be in the image

26 Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Patristiche Texte und Studien) 38 (Berlin: 1994), I.9–10.

27 Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Leiden: 1995), 4.

28 Clement of Alexandria, *Protrep.* 4; cf. Plato, *Republic*, 10.

29 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, eds. Otto Stählin, Ludwig Früchtel, and Ursula Treu, GCS 17 and 52 (Berlin: 1970–85), 5.5.

30 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.5 (see discussion of philosophical sources below).

31 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.27.

32 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6.

and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27), Origen insists that this *imago Dei* is not one of bodily resemblance, but rather a similitude of mind or intellect.³³ Significantly, Origen was one of the few early Christian writers who actually invoked Jewish reticence about figurative images and actually cited the biblical injunctions against images in his argument with his polytheist adversary Celsus. Echoing the description of Plato's *Republic*, he asserts that the ancient Hebrews refused to accord image-makers the rights of citizenship and expelled any who dared make objects that would attract the idolatrous devotion of the foolish. Therefore, no painters or sculptors lived among them. He then quotes the biblical injunction against graven likenesses.³⁴

The North African contemporaries of Clement and Origen include Marcus Minucius Felix (d. ca. 260), who wrote a fictional dialogue between a Christian and a polytheist in which the latter condescendingly attacks Christians for their lack of images, altars, and temples. Minucius Felix's Christian spokesperson explains the absence of images of the Christian God by asserting that humans are themselves God's proper image, although without specifying the nature of that image.³⁵ He insisted that the pagan images were unaware of their elevated status, and if left unattended, became convenient sites for perching birds, mice nests, and spiders' webs.³⁶ One of the interesting aspects of Minucius Felix's dialog is that he almost never cites biblical texts to support his arguments.

The most extensive early Christian criticism of cult images comes from the writings of Tertullian of Carthage (d. 220). Tertullian's treatise, *On Idolatry*, probably written between 203 and 206, is the earliest known full-length treatment of the topic. In this work, Tertullian generally defines idolatry as showing honor to any god other than the Christian one. He regards consorting with "false deities" as defiling and akin to fornication insofar as it contaminates the one who intentionally or unintentionally engages them.³⁷ Tertullian also considers idolatry a form of fraud, as it denies the True God the veneration due him while extending it to the unworthy ones. Additionally, he regards idolatry as the source of other grievous sins, which result from venerating something

33 Origen, *Origenes Werke*, eds. P. Koetschau et al., 12 vols (Berlin: 1899–1955), *Homiliae in Genesum* 1.13; *De Principiis* 1.1; *Commentarii in epistolam ad Romanos* 1.19.8, 5.1.28. On the question of the humans as the image of God see Alexander Altmann, "Homo Imago Dei in Jewish and Christian Theology," *Journal of Religion* 48 (1968), 235–59.

34 Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.31. Another example of Origen's citation of the biblical prohibition is found in his homilies on Exodus: *Homiliae in Exodum* 8.3–4.

35 Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, ed. Bernhard Kytzler (Leipzig: 1982), 32.1.

36 Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 24.5–9.

37 For an excellent study of this text see Stephanie Binder, *Tertullian, On Idolatry and Mishnah Avodah Zara* (Leiden: 2012).

in the world more than God.³⁸ Here he may be thinking of Paul's claim that God will hand over those who trade "the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being" into "degrading passions" and "debased minds" (Romans 1:20–32).

Possibly based on this passage from Romans, Tertullian has a more expansive definition of idolatry than many of his peers. While, like Justin or Clement, Tertullian called it ignorant to honor a statue that could be melted down to make a cooking pot, his condemnation extends to any activity that involved cult images, including the building or repairing of temples or altars. Other kinds of related activities were also implicated, from astrology to acting—in short, any kind of profession that involved its practitioner with cult images, pagan rituals, or swearing of oaths. Among the prohibited activities were civic rituals, military service, teaching secular literature, certain kinds of public service, attending shows or the theatre, setting lamps or laurel wreaths before doors, and participating in pagan religious festivals. Going to the public baths was problematic, mainly because of the statues that might be set up in them.³⁹ Christian artisans had to be particularly careful not to participate in the embellishment of temples or making repairs to objects that might include restoring gods' images. Instead, Tertullian urges them to limit their work to repairing roofs or—at the higher end—to shoe and slipper gilding.⁴⁰

Essentially, Tertullian expects adherents to the Christian faith to separate themselves from what would have been many customary or daily Roman social activities. The ubiquity of the gods in public places as well as the private dwellings of friends and business colleagues required Christians be continually on guard lest they unwittingly engage in some form of idolatry. He allows that Christians should attend weddings or baby-naming ceremonies, so long as they avoid any sacrifices included in the celebrations. Similarly, someone may accept a civil magistracy, so long as the office can be carried out without attending sacrifices, contracting for gladiator shows, making tax assessments

38 Tertullian, *De Idololatria*, ed. and trans. Jan Hendrik Waszink, J. Van Winden, and P van der Nat (Leiden: 1987), 1.4.

39 Tertullian, *Idol.* 14–15.

40 Tertullian, *Idol.* 8. The exclusion of artists as well as other kinds of professionals from the Christian community (and from receiving baptism) is also evident in Cyprian, *Epistulae*, ed. G. Dierks, *Sancti Cypriani episcopi epistularium*, CCL 3B-D (Turnhout: 1994–99), Ep. 2; and the *Apostolic Tradition*, ed. Bernard Botte, *Hippolyte de Tome: la Tradition apostolique d'après les anciennes versions* (2nd ed., Paris: 1968), 16, a text traditionally (but probably erroneously) assigned to Hippolytus of Rome.

for the maintenance of temples, donning purple raiment and gold insignia, or taking an oath of allegiance.⁴¹

Like Clement, however, Tertullian tackled an apparent contradiction in the Hebrew Scriptures, where Moses was ordered to produce what was, apparently, a graven image: the bronze serpent (Num 21:6–9). In order to resolve this problem, Tertullian defined idols in a way that gave some latitude to God's ordering Moses to make this particular image, insofar as it was a type or prefiguration of the cross (John 3:14).⁴² In his treatise against Marcion, he responds to what must have been his adversary's charge of divine inconsistency on the matter of images by offering a complicated definition of images that were either curative (like the bronze serpent) or purely decorative and thus not objects of veneration (like the cherubim).⁴³

Unlike Clement or his fellow African, Minucius Felix, Tertullian avoids ridiculing the images of the gods or the rituals, prayers, and sacrifices that involved them, although he clearly judged these things as dangerous. Perhaps because he addresses a Christian audience, Tertullian cites scripture to support his points. He specifically notes Exodus 20:4, but adds references to Enoch 99:6–7, Isaiah 44:8–9, Psalm 115:8; Psalm 135:18. Similarly, Tertullian never specifies pictorial images as necessarily idolatrous in themselves, although he condemns those who make them. He also stipulates that every kind of artwork could be idolatrous, whether painted, sculpted, or embroidered. It does not even need to be human-like in form or appearance.⁴⁴ To these points, Tertullian adds what he describes as a long-established fact that the honors accorded to cult images are actually directed to long-dead human beings.⁴⁵

1.2 *Christian Apologists' Acknowledgement of Philosophical Aniconism*

As noted above, Clement asserts that the Christian teaching on images is more ancient than that of the philosophers, who, he insists, actually derived their judgments from the teachings of Moses.⁴⁶ Broadly speaking, Clement claimed that anyone who really thinks about it will realize that God is one, unbegotten, indestructible, eternal, and dwells somewhere in the outermost reaches

41 Tertullian, *Idol.* 17.

42 Tertullian, *Idol.* 5.

43 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, ed. Jan Hendrik Waszink (Antwerp: 1956), 2.22. See a useful discussion on this problem in both Clement and Tertullian in Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images*, 123–26 and 133–34.

44 Tertullian, *Idol.* 3.3.

45 Tertullian, *Idol.* 15.2—a practice often called by the term “euhemerism.”

46 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.5 (see discussion of philosophical sources below).

of the cosmos. He clinches his argument with a quote from Euripides: "What nature, say, must we ascribe to God? Who sees all and yet never is seen?"⁴⁷ Thus, Clement clearly understood that Christians were not unique in claiming God's invisibility, even though he allowed that Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Cleanthes, the Pythagoreans, and Antisthenes were indebted to Moses's insistence on transcendent perfection and incomprehensibility of the divine being.

Clement's follower, Origen of Alexandria, wrote an account of his debate with the polytheist Celsus. In the first section of his work, he cites Celsus's claim that Christian attitudes towards idols are correct but not unique, insofar as the argument against image worship had already been made by Heraclitus, Zeno of Citium, and others.⁴⁸ In defense of his co-religionists, Celsus further asserted that Christians have misconstrued the ways polytheists view representations of the gods. Only the most naïve, he insists, regard the images themselves as divine. Instead, he explains, such objects are merely meant to allow polytheist devotees to direct their prayers or tributes to the deities they depict.⁴⁹ Thus, cult images are not utterly useless objects; they serve an important religious purpose that elevates them above ordinary artifacts.

Finding common ground with respected pre-Christian intellectuals was a common stratagem of Christian apologists. For example, Justin Martyr honestly admitted that Christians agree with many of the teachings of ancient poets and philosophers. In his *First Apology*, he specifically claims that all intelligent persons realize that manufactured images of the gods are merely the work of human hands and necessarily inferior to the artisans who made them. Noting that the ancient thinkers have already asserted this, Justin distinguishes Christian teachings as simply more truthful, complete, and proven.⁵⁰ Likewise, Tertullian realized that worship of images, which he describes as common superstition, had been long decried. He expresses this succinctly in his *Apology*, where he argues that Romans should be more tolerant of Christians, because they are really no different from the philosophers who, "openly overthrow your gods, and in their writings, they attack your superstitions" and, he adds, "you applaud them for it."⁵¹

Marcus Minucius Felix's protagonist declares that, like Christians, the poets and philosophers also bear witness to the idea that God is mind and spirit only. He offers to review the teachings of the philosophers to demonstrate

47 Clement of Alexandria, *Prot.* 6; quoting from Euripides, *Fragments*, 1129.

48 Origen, *Cels.* 1.5

49 Origen, *Cels.* 7.62, 66.

50 Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 9–10.

51 Tertullian, *Apol.* 46.4.

the concord between what they propose and what Christianity propounds. He then provides a formidable litany of ancient witnesses, beginning with Thales of Miletus and continuing through Anaximenes, Diogenes of Apollonia, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Antisthenes, Speusippus, Demoncritus, Straton, Epicurus, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Heraclides of Pontus, Zeno, Chrysippus, Cleanthes, Diogenes of Babylon, Xenophon, Socrates, Ariston, and finally Plato.⁵² In almost every instance he declares that their views about the nature of God are pretty well identical to Christian teaching, even if they use different expressions, names, or titles. Like them, the One whom Christians call Father of All, can neither be seen nor comprehended in any respect. He is the origin of everything, architect of the universe, source of life, and essentially incorporeal mind, reason, or spirit.⁵³

A similar kind of explanation is also attributed to another polytheist interlocutor, this time reported by the Christian apologist Arnobius (255–330), who launched the usual attack on the traditional gods as well as on their cult images. Significantly, he recognizes that polytheists claim that they do not worship images but rather offer worship to the gods by means of the images. But then why, he asks, should they need images as intermediaries at all? Why supplicate an insensate imitation rather than the deity directly—to supplicate a god by making prayer to something else? Why should it be advantageous to see an otherwise unseen god, even if some believed that the likeness somehow mediated the divine presence to the devotee?⁵⁴

Acknowledgements like those of Justin, Clement, Origen, and Arnobius reveal that most learned Christians knew that the majority of polytheists comprehended the difference between representative cult images and actual immortal gods. They realized that pagan cult images were merely representative, essentially served as a focus for devotion, and could not be contained or confined to a single physical object. These Christian authors were cognizant of perfectly reasonable defenses of the images' role in fostering piety and personal virtue. Thus, although they persisted in their mocking condemnations, these critics undeniably recognized that their opponents were neither ignorant nor perverse. Nevertheless, they apparently had identified an issue about which their opponents felt vulnerable, even if they overstated the problem. Their mocking characterizations may have been meant both as an offensive and defensive strategy against those who had attacked their own religious practices and beliefs. They claimed common ground with respected intellectual

52 Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 19.3–15.

53 Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 19.2.

54 Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes*, ed. August Reifferscheid (Vienna: 1875), 6.9, 17.

tradition while simultaneously trying to make their opponents look foolish for criticizing Christian practices that were no different than those they (as right-minded intellectuals) actually espoused themselves. Simultaneously, they ingeniously positioned Christian teachings to be the new embodiment of true philosophical principles.

1.3 *The Earliest Christian Art*

Even though early Christians objected to the practice of venerating visual representations of divine beings, little surviving evidence indicates that they unequivocally or consistently disapproved of figurative art. Presumably, then Christians could properly make and own objects bearing pictorial images, and some evidence exists to indicate that this was the case. For example, Clement of Alexandria, one of the most severe critics of such misplaced veneration, nevertheless made concrete suggestions for what Christians should engrave on their signet rings:

Let the seals [of our rings] be of a dove or fish or ship in full sail or of a musical lyre, such as Polycrates used, or of a ship's anchor, like the one Seleucus had engraved in an intaglio; or, if anyone be a fisherman, let him make an image of the Apostles and of the children out of the water. No representation of an idol may be impressed on the ring, for we are forbidden to possess such an image, nor may a sword or bow, for we cultivate peace, nor a drinking cup for we practice temperance.⁵⁵

Clement's suggestions of appropriate seal iconography for Christians is arguably contradictory, as he elsewhere urged Christians not to own engraved seals, because that would indicate they were attached to (or attracted by) sensible objects.⁵⁶ In any case, his admonitions simply demonstrate that Christians evidently sought to indicate their religious affiliation and differentiate themselves from their non-Christian neighbors, long before the era of persecution had ended. Another textual reference comes from one of the works of

55 Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, ed. Otto Stählin and Ursula Treu, *Clemens Alexandrinus Bd. I. Protrepticus. Paedagogus*, 3rd ed. *GCS* 12 (Berlin: 1972), 3.59.2, trans. Simon Wood, *Clement of Alexandria, Christ the Educator*, Fathers of the Church vol. 23 (Washington, DC: 1954), 246. Compare Clement's comments on simple, undecorated attire in *Paed.* 3.11. See James Francis, "Clement of Alexandria on Signet Rings: Reading an Image at the Dawn of Christian Art," *Classical Philology* 98 (2003), 179–83; Paul Corby Finney, "Images on Finger Rings and Early Christian Art," *DOP* 41 (1987), 181–87.

56 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.5.

Tertullian of Carthage, who describes goblets inscribed with images of the Good Shepherd.⁵⁷ Surviving material evidence indicates that, at least from the third century onwards, Christians in fact followed similar practices with regard to the decoration of simple domestic items such as lamps or dishware, and surviving artifacts of this sort display simple figures like fish, doves, and anchors, or narrative figures Noah, Jonah, Adam and Eve, and other biblical characters (Figure 1.1). Even more elaborate are the varied paintings and relief carvings they chose to decorate their tombs, which have survived largely because most were below ground, like those found in the Roman catacombs. At least one of these catacombs was named for the deacon (and future bishop of Rome), Callixtus, whom Pope Zephyrinus may have appointed to oversee the cemetery as an interment place for early Christians.⁵⁸ No surviving evidence suggests that church authorities were officially consulted on the pictorial decoration of the burial chambers but if so, they evidently did not object.

Although these monuments—wall paintings, inscribed epitaphs, and relief carvings on sarcophagi—sometimes included decorative elements commonly found in Roman funerary art or ambiguous characters such as the praying figure (*orant*) or a scene of diners seated around a semi-circular table, the inclusion of biblical narrative scenes was a development that allows scholars to classify particular monuments as essentially Christian in character.⁵⁹ Because we cannot be absolutely certain that all these objects were made exclusively for self-identified Christian clients, their subject matter is the primary basis for that identification. In other words, early Christian art usually is demarcated by its subject matter.

Largely discovered in the environs of Rome and the funerary chambers of the extensive network of catacombs in that place, the catalog of 3rd-century iconographic subjects was initially dominated by characters and stories from the Hebrew Scriptures. Among these early subjects were depictions of Adam and Eve (shown flanking the tree with the forbidden fruit), Noah in his ark,

57 Tertullian, *De Pudicitia*, eds. Eligius Dekkers et al., *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani opera*, CCL 1–2 (Turnhout: 1954), 1279–1330, 7.1–2; 10.12.

58 Mentioned by Hippolytus, *Haer.* 9.7.

59 Many handbooks to early Christian art are available, but for recent overviews with brief bibliographies see Norbert Zimmerman, “Catacomb Painting and the Rise of Christian Iconography,” and Jutta Dresken-Weiland, “Christian Sarcophagi from Rome,” in *The Routledge Handbook to Early Christian Art*, eds. Robin Jensen and M. Ellison (London: 2018), 21–38, 39–55; and Jeffrey Spier (ed.), *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: 2007) (with introductory essays by several art historians and a useful catalogue of objects).



FIGURE 1.1 Jonah under the gourd vine, ceramic lamp from North Africa (Tunisia)
PRIVATE COLLECTION. PHOTO: ANNEWIES VAN DEN HOEK AND JOHN
HERRMANN, USED WITH PERMISSION

Abraham offering his son Isaac for sacrifice, Moses striking the rock in the wilderness, Daniel in the lions' den, the three Hebrew Youths in the fiery furnace, Jonah being swallowed and then spit up by the sea creature, and Susanna with the elders. The compositions of the wall paintings and sarcophagus reliefs show a large degree of standardization although no two are identical. The iconographic repertoire is fairly limited and so easily identified as recognizable types. For example, Adam and Eve stand to either side of the tree that bears the forbidden fruit. They usually are shown with their hands covering their genitals and with their eyes cast down (Figure 1.2). Noah is ordinarily portrayed as an *orant*, standing in a small boxlike ark, its lid rising behind him. Daniel, also an *orant*, is represented as a heroic nude flanked by two lions (Figure 1.3).

This evident appreciation for Hebrew Scripture subjects led some commentators to propose the influence of Jewish iconography on these early Christian paintings, even to posit the existence of an illustrated Septuagint as a kind of



FIGURE 1.2 Adam and Eve from the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome
PHOTO REPRODUCED FROM G. WILPERT, *ROMA SOTTERRANEA: LE PITTURE
DELLE CATAcombe ROMANE* (ROME: DESCLÉE, 1903), TAV. 101



FIGURE 1.3 Vault painting, Daniel in center surrounded with scenes from the Jonah story and Noah in the ark. Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome

PHOTO REPRODUCED FROM: G. WILPERT, *ROMA SOTTERRANEA: LE PITTURE DELLE CATAcombe ROMANE* (ROME: DESCLÉE, 1903), TAV. 104

missing link between Jewish and Christian iconography.⁶⁰ Problematically, no such model has survived and extant examples of late antique Jewish art show little in common, either stylistically or in subject matter, with Christian

60 For example, see Kurt Weitzmann, "The Illustration of the Septuagint," in Herbert Kessler (ed.), *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Illumination* (Chicago: 1971), 45–75; and reiterated in Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, DC: 1990).

catacomb painting. Nevertheless, even if such models were discovered, the popularity of these stories in Christian iconography demonstrates their significance for Christian typological exegesis, catechesis, prayer, and preaching. Christians maintained the importance of Hebrew Scriptures as part of their own story of salvation and saw these biblical figures as types pointing to the future coming of Christ and the establishment of the church and its sacraments.

In any case, New Testament Gospel scenes often appeared alongside these Hebrew Scripture figures and became equally prominent by the late 3rd century. One of the earliest was the portrayal of John the Baptist baptizing a small, nude Jesus (Figure 1.4). More scenes from Jesus's ministry gradually appeared on tomb walls and sarcophagus reliefs (Figure 1.5). These included scenes of Jesus healing the paralytic, the hemorrhaging woman with the issue of blood, and the man born blind. Other popular compositions included the adoration of the magi, Jesus raising Lazarus, meeting the Samaritan woman at the well, multiplying loaves and fish, and changing water to wine.

In the meantime, at least one signally important monument that was discovered in eastern Syria in the middle of the 20th century—the house church at Dura-Europos—provides unassailable evidence that at least some early Christian meeting places were also decorated with pictorial imagery. The iconography that survived was located primarily in the baptismal chamber and includes a cycle of biblical narrative paintings that appear to serve as typological figures for that sacrament: Jesus walking on water, stilling the storm, healing the paralytic, Adam and Eve, the five wise brides coming to the tent of the bridegroom, the Good Shepherd, David with Goliath, and an image that may depict either the Samaritan woman or the annunciation to the Virgin Mary at a well.⁶¹

From the 4th century forward, more New Testament narrative scenes were added to the Christian iconographic repertoire, including the visitation of the magi to the infant Christ and Christ entering Jerusalem. The Book of Acts inspired an image of Peter's arrest, which was frequently juxtaposed with an

61 On the interpretation of these images see Michael Peppard, *The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos* (New Haven: 2016). Peppard's book includes an excellent bibliography and also argues against the identification of the woman at the well, preferring it to be an early image of the annunciation to the Virgin Mary. See also Dominic Serra, "The Baptistery at Dura-Europos: The Wall Paintings in the Context of Syrian Baptismal Theology," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 120 (2006), 67–78; and Sanne Klaver, "The Brides of Christ: 'The Women in Procession' in the Baptistery of Dura-Europos," *Eastern Christian Art* 9 (2012–13), 63–78.



FIGURE 1.4 Baptism of Jesus, Catacomb of Callixtus
FROM G. WILPERT, *ROMA SOTTERRANEA: LE PITTURE DELLE CATACOMBE ROMANE* (ROME: DESCLÉE, 1903), TAV. 39B, DETAIL



FIGURE 1.5 Early Christian sarcophagus, with Peter baptizing his Roman jailers, Peter arrested, Jesus changing water to wine, healing the blind man, healing the paralytic, and Jesus healing the woman with the hemorrhage, ca. 300–325 NOW IN THE VATICAN MUSEO PIO CRISTIANO. PHOTO CREDIT: VANNI ARCHIVE/ART RESOURCE, NY

image of the saint striking a rock to baptize his Roman jailers, an image that has a surviving textual parallel in a later apocryphal source, the *Acts of Peter*, and was evidently intended to indicate Peter's role as a type of new Moses (see Figure. 1.5). Following the Constantinian revolution that initially legalized Christianity and gradually made it the official religion of the Roman Empire, the quality and complexity of Christian iconography were notably advanced. One famous example, the Junius Bassus sarcophagus, shows extraordinary technical skill and sophistication, combining biblical narrative scenes like the Fall of Adam and Eve, Abraham's offering of Isaac, Daniel, and Jesus entering Jerusalem, with an early depiction of Jesus before Pilate, and the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul. Although some episodes from the Passion narratives began to appear in Christian art by the mid- to late-4th century, often featuring an empty cross surmounted by a wreathed Christogram, depictions of Christ's crucifixion are notably absent from Christian art prior to the early fifth century, and then are still rare until the 6th century and later. One of the most popular images in this period shows an ascended or enthroned Jesus presenting the New Law to Rome's two founding apostles, Peter and Paul (Figure 1.6).

Once Christianity was legalized and subsequently patronized by the emperor along with wealthy members of the community, the venue for Christian art shifted from the private to the public sphere, in particular in the construction and decoration of major basilicas, martyria, and baptisteries. This transition coincided with the gradual eclipse of popular earlier motifs like the Good Shepherd or Jonah and an emphasis on iconography that emphasized the glory of a regnant and ascended Christ and the emergence of saints' portraits apart from any narrative context. Often Christ was accompanied by the patron saint of a particular church along with archangels and the local bishop presenting a model of the basilica as a kind of votive offering (Figure 1.7).



FIGURE 1.6 *Traditio Legis* (Jesus giving the law to Peter and Paul) from Naples, Baptistery of San Giovanni in Fonte, 5th cen

PHOTO: AUTHOR

Such sumptuous images, frequently featured in church apses, were made from glittering polychrome glass and gold-leaf mosaic. These were sometimes joined by smaller mosaic panels adorning nave walls and side chapels. Mosaic pavements, such as those at the double basilica of Aquileia (ca. 315–320) also included figurative images drawn from biblical narratives along with more traditionally Roman decorative motifs. In addition, precious materials like silver, gold, ivory, various gems, and bronze were worked for liturgical objects,



FIGURE 1.7 Apse mosaic, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna, ca. 550

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diptychs, reliquaries, and sanctuary lamps that featured both narrative and portrait images. Gold glasses appeared with images of the saints (Figure 1.8). By the early 5th century, codices of the sacred books began to be bound with ivory or silver and by the 6th were illuminated with miniature paintings.

Significantly, examples of sculpture in the round remained rare and most that have survived are relatively small in size. These include a number of small statuettes of the Good Shepherd, Peter and Paul, and a group of Jonah figures, mostly dated to the late 3rd century (Figure 1.9). Ambiguously identified instances include the life-sized, enthroned depiction of the Roman schismatic bishop, Hippolytus, now at the entrance to the Vatican Library, and a smaller, seated figure often identified as Christ, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano.⁶² Documentary evidence of lost examples includes the recorded gifts of the

62 The Hippolytus sculpture appears to have been reconstructed from a personification of one of the sciences, wisdom, or a Roman philosopher portrait. See Alan Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden: 1995), chaps. 1–2. The so-called Christ statuette in the Museo Nazionale (Terme) was originally identified as a seated poetess but reidentified on the basis of its similarity to depictions of Christ on 4th-century sarcophagi. See Oskar Thulin, “Die Christus-Statuette im Museo Nazionale Romano,” *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Institutes, Römische Abteilung* 44 (1929), 201–59, and summary



FIGURE 1.8 Gold glass with Peregrina, Peter, and Paul, mid 300s, Rome
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PUBLIC DOMAIN

Emperor Constantine to the furnishing of the Lateran Basilica and its annexed baptistery: silver statues of Christ, John the Baptist, and the apostles as well as a solid gold Lamb of God and seven silver stags that surrounded the baptismal font.⁶³ Eusebius of Caesarea mentions a statue group in Caesarea Philippi that most likely depicted an emperor in the posture of extending clemency, but came to be interpreted by Christians as representing Jesus healing the

of scholarly assessments in Niels Hannestad, "How Did Rising Christianity Cope with Pagan Sculpture?" in Evangelos Chyrsos and Ian Wood (eds.), *East and West: Modes of Communication* (Leiden: 1999), 173–204, 173–75.

63 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris: 1886–92), 34.9, 13 (Sylvester).

hemorrhaging woman.⁶⁴ The general lack of statuary suggests that Christians eschewed this form of visual art, perhaps because it was too similar in appearance to the images of the pagan gods that they had denounced as idolatrous.⁶⁵

What seems most evident, when considering the textual and material evidence together, is that early Christians perceived a functional distinction between art that was decorative, symbolic, or didactic and cult objects that served ritual functions. Ordinary Christians could have regarded their smaller objects as belonging to a mundane, domestic world. When larger art objects eventually appeared, they were not understood as objects for worship and therefore presented no danger of idolatry. Moreover, Christian converts from polytheism had enjoyed a rich material dimension to their religious practice and were as inclined to adapt certain conventions, applying them to their new faith, as to judge their former customs as altogether incompatible. This ability to incorporate a pagan past into the artistic or material production of the emerging church means that, like the statue group at Caesarea Philippi, many of the earliest Christian artistic motifs were modeled on Greco-Roman prototypes or reinterpreted to reflect infused Christian significance. In this way, the familiar vocabulary of Greco-Roman religious iconography could be made applicable for a new religious purpose.

1.4 *Fourth-Century Controversies over Christian Devotional Portraits*

At the beginning of the 4th century (ca. 305), a church council held in Elvira, Spain, produced a number of canons, one in particular that seems to have

64 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, eds. Eduard Schwartz, Theodor Mommsen, and Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke. Bd. 2: Kirchengeschichte*, GCS NF 6 (2nd ed., Berlin: 1999), 7.18. This may have been once an image of Hadrian with Judaea Capta, according to John F. Wilson, "The Statue of Christ at Banias: A Saga of Pagan-Christian Confrontation in 4th Century Syro-Palestine," *ARAM* 18–19 (2006), 1–11. See also John F. Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, The Lost City of Pan* (London: 2004), 93. Other ancient authors also mention this statue, including Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, eds. Joseph Bidez and Günther Christian Hansen, *Sozomenus, Kirchengeschichte*, GCS n.s. 4 (2nd ed., Berlin: 1995), 5.21; Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, eds. Eduard Schwartz and Theodor Mommsen, *Eusebius Werke. Bd. 2.2: Kirchengeschichte*, GCS 9.1 (Berlin: 1908), 7.18.2; and Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, ed. Bruno Krusch, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 1.2 (Hanover: 1969), 211–94, 20.

65 On the subject of freestanding sculpture see Katherine Marsengill, "The Christian Reception of Sculpture in Late Antiquity and the Historical Reception of Late Antique Christian Sculpture," *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 1 (2014), 67–101. Also, Bente Kiilerich, "Sculpture in the Round in the Early Byzantine Period: Constantinople and the East" in Lennart Rydén and Jan Olof Rosenquist (eds.), *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium: Papers Read at a Colloquium Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul 31 May–5 June, 1992* (Istanbul: 1993), 85–97.



FIGURE 1.9 Jonah swallowed, marble statuette from Asia Minor, ca. 280–90
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MUSEUM'S OPEN ACCESS POLICY

targeted the existence and role of saints' portraits. The intention, precise date, and correct translation of this canon are disputed, but it appears to have focused on the inappropriate veneration of images and not on the images themselves. The Latin reads: *Placuit picturas in ecclesia esse non debere, ne quod colitur et adoratur in parietibus depingatur*, which is most correctly translated as "There shall be no pictures in churches, lest what is revered and adored be depicted on the walls."⁶⁶ Because it is doubtful that narrative images would have comprised images that were either too sacred to be depicted or attracted veneration, it seems most likely that the images in question were frontal portraits of saints or of Christ that might become the objects of homage or prayer. Yet, because the

66 *Council of Elvria*, Canon 36. Text and translation in Karl Joseph Hefele, *History of the Christian Councils*, trans. William Clark (London: 1894), 151. On the question of the dating of the canons and whether they all belong to this early 4th-century council, see José Vives, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos, España Cristiana, Textos 1* (Barcelona: 1963), 78. For more discussion on the translation of the canon's text see Grigg, "Aniconic Worship;" and Murray, "Art and the Early Church," 20–21.

precise meaning of "*picturas*" is ambiguous, it is possible that the canon may have prohibited any kind of figurative art on church walls.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, a small group of early Christian writings, some of them of uncertain authenticity, indicate that portrait images of saints or of Christ both existed and were particularly controversial, significantly around the time when such images began to appear with more frequency. Among the most famous is a letter attributed to Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339) that he purportedly addressed to the Emperor Constantine's sister, responding to her request that he provide her with a portrait of Christ that she might use for her private devotions. Eusebius refuses her appeal, explaining that what she wanted was impossible. As if he was presciently aware of the complex arguments that would be deployed in the later Christological debates of the 5th century, Eusebius explains that no artist could depict Christ's invisible, un-circumscribable divine nature, but show him only in his external appearance, which could be no more than an inanimate imitation of the form he assumed in his incarnation. To do with would be to heretically divide his inseparable human and divine natures. His argument echoes the objects of John to Lycomedes's portrait, mentioned above—that no portrait could be a true representation of any person. At the end of his letter, he adds the interesting detail, that a woman had once presented him with a picture of two men in the guise of philosophers and insisted that they were depictions of Paul and Christ. Declaring that he had no idea where she had obtained the image or why she believed that it was an image of the apostle and the Savior, he also decided it was best to confiscate the object.⁶⁸

67 See a longer discussion in Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images*, 161–66, where the author cites the analysis of Samuel Leuchli, *Power and Sexuality: The Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira* (Philadelphia: 1972), 36.

68 Fragments included in the Iconoclasts' *Horos* of 754. Eusebius, *Letter to Constantia*, trans. Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: 1986), 16–18. The authenticity of the letter has been challenged, though widely (now) accepted as authentic. See Claudia Sode, and Paul Speck, "Ikonoklasmus vor der Zeit? Der Brief des Eusebius von Kaisareia an Kaiserin Konstantia," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 54 (2004), 113–134. Among those who question the authenticity of this letter are Mary Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 28 (1977), 335–6. Murray later revised her opinion based on the challenge by Stephen Gero, "The True Image of Christ: Eusebius' Letter to Constantia Reconsidered," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 32 (1981), 460–70; and Murray, "Le problème de l'iconophobie et les premiers siècles chrétiens," in Francois Boespflug and Nicolas Lossky (eds.), *Nicée II, 787–1987: Douze siècles d'images religieuses*, (Paris: 1987), 39–50. Other scholars who doubt the letter's authenticity are Timothy Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: 1984), 401, n. 82; and Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images*, 193–99.

Eusebius's letter contrasts somewhat with his eye-witness description of the sculpture group in Caesarea Philippi that supposedly depicted Christ healing the hemorrhaging woman.⁶⁹ Eusebius seems somewhat skeptical of the actual intended identity of the figures, pointing out that the male figure only vaguely resembles Jesus. Yet, he allows that the statue group was regarded by local citizens as a memorial to Christ's miracle by converts who, not knowing better, continued in their old habits of erecting honorific statues to those they regarded as deliverers. Again, he adds that he is aware of similar practices, specifically of the veneration of portraits of Peter, Paul, and Christ. Thus, Eusebius seems troubled by the existence of these portraits, but—assuming they were honored by newly converted pagans who may not know better—he is not surprised at their existence, nor does he condemn them outright.

A younger contemporary of Eusebius's, Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403), produced a catalog of heresies which addresses various kinds of abuses of both practice and theology. In this catalog, he echoes Eusebius's concern that newly converted Christians tend to revert to their previous pagan customs when images are set up—they worship and offer sacrifices and so fall back into idolatry.⁷⁰ In less certainly authentic fragments of other writings attributed to him, Epiphanius recounts having encountered a number of portraits of Christ and the saints and his outraged destruction of them. These fragments come from Epiphanius's *Testament* as well as excerpts from letters to the Emperor Theodosius I and Bishop John of Jerusalem.⁷¹ In his *Testament*, the author likens depictions of Peter, Paul, and John, made in colors on plaster walls of private homes as an abomination similar to the pagan idols. He dismisses the explanation that the images were meant to honor and be reminded of the apostles, saying that images were merely false inventions of painters who followed their own whims and represented the glorious apostles as if they were merely ordinary men.⁷²

In his letter to the bishop of Jerusalem, Epiphanius describes how, when on his way from Jerusalem to Bethel, he came to the village of Anautha and found there a church with a curtain painted with the image of Christ or one

69 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.18.

70 Epiphanius, *Panarion*, ed. Jürgen Dummer (2nd ed., Berlin: 2011), 27.6.9–10.

71 These texts are included in Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 41–43. On the question of authenticity see Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 93, n. 28. John of Damascus had already declared these a forgery in the 8th century, in *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3 (Berlin: 1975), 1.38.

72 Epiphanius, *Testament*, trans. in Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 41. The *Letter to Theodosius* is also included here, on 41–42.

of the saints. He pronounced this a defiling idol and, in his fury, tore it down and suggested it be used as a pauper's shroud. The upset congregation asked him to replace the curtain, and he apparently agreed, but only after he had found an acceptable substitute. Perhaps sensing that he needed the assistance of a higher authority, in his letter to the Emperor Theodosius, Epiphanius flatly denies that any ancient Christian teacher could have painted an image of Christ either for display in a church or in a private house and complains that he has often urged his fellow clergy that images should be removed but without success. He insists that artists make images according to their own whim, and—with no justification—show Peter as an old man with short hair and beard, Paul with a receding hairline, and Jesus with long hair (in contrast to the closely cropped coifs of his disciples). He entreats the emperor to act, saying that the sovereign would know how to proceed in the wisdom granted to him by God.⁷³ Epiphanius concludes his letter by allowing that the single “salutary sign” of Christ (i.e., the empty cross) should suffice for doors and everywhere else.

The Latin-speaking imperial courtier, Lactantius (250–325) likely was influenced by his teacher Arnobius and repeated many of his objections to the veneration of idols as well as Arnobius's acknowledgement that pagans did not actually worship physical objects but rather the divine beings that they depicted.⁷⁴ His arguments raise an additional point regarding the value of portraits as aids to memory or consolation in the absence of the prototype. He recognizes that this may be helpful in regard to human beings, but he insists that it is unnecessary to gaze upon images of God (or the gods), who are never actually absent. If the model is present, then why need the image unless the gods are, in fact, merely dead men and not deities at all. By contrast, the Christian God need not and cannot be imaged because he is both present and incomprehensible.

Lactantius's arguments clearly deny the validity of images of God but appear to concede a benefit to images of dead saints. Thus, in contrast to the writings of Eusebius or Epiphanius, several texts indicate appreciation for portraits of the saints, particularly when they are connected to shrines dedicated to them. For instance, in a homily praising Melitius, his saintly predecessor bishop of

73 Text in, George Ostrogorsky, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (Breslau: 1929), 67, fragment 2, trans. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 41–42. As Mango points out, the authenticity of the Epiphanius fragments has been questioned, but are now mainly accepted as genuine. See discussion in Murray, “Art and the Early Church,” 336–38.

74 Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, ed. Samuel Brandt (Vienna: 1890), 2.2.

Antioch, John Chrysostom (d. 407) commends those who commission images of the man for their signet rings, bedroom walls, drinking cups, or other objects that would allow them to frequently regard the saintly bishop's likeness and be motivated by his example of holiness. He draws a parallel to those parents who gave their children the saint's name, and says that by adding his image, they receive a double consolation.⁷⁵

Other 4th-century documents describe the pictorial decoration of churches and martyria with images that depicted biblical stories or the bravery and suffering of Christian martyrs. Both of these types seem to have been uncontroversial, possibly because they were didactic or inspirational rather than devotional and would not have prompted viewers' direct prayer or veneration. Many of the works of the Spanish poet Prudentius (348–413) serve as examples, although we have no surviving paintings to match his elaborate ekphrastic expositions.⁷⁶ For example, Gregory of Nyssa (335–394) praised the painter who colorfully depicted the heroic deeds and terrible sufferings of St. Theodore in the saint's shrine at Euchaita (near Amaseia in Pontus). He describes the shrine as splendidly adorned with images of flowers made to render the martyr's virtues along with the images of his tormentors, the spectators, and above all the one who judged the contest, Christ. All these figures, Gregory says, were the equivalent of a book that eloquently but silently told its tale from the walls instead of from pages.⁷⁷

A similar instance comes from a sermon attributed to Gregory's friend and contemporary, Basil of Caesarea (330–379), although some scholars suggest that it should be assigned to John Chrysostom. In any case, when it was delivered at the martyrium of St. Barlaam in Antioch, the preacher commented on the depiction of the saint's sufferings as he let his hand be burned rather than drop sacrificial incense on the first kindled before a pagan cult statue.⁷⁸ In this example, Christ is again described as present in the image as the judge or presider over the contest. In a sermon more certainly attributed to Basil,

75 John Chrysostom, *Homilia encomium in Melitium*, 3.

76 Prudentius's descriptions of visual depictions of martyrdoms are mainly collected in his *Peristephanon* (*On Martyrs' Crowns*), ed. M.P. Cunningham, *Carmina*, CCL 126 (Turnhout: 1966).

77 See here Gregory of Nyssa, *Laudatio S. Theodori*, PG 46: 736–48, 737, trans. Efthymios Rizos in *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* (database), <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E01748>. See also Prudentius's various examples. Compare this with Gregory's sermon on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, where he also compares the image with a sermon.

78 Pseudo-Basil, *Homilia* 17 (*In Barlaam martyrem*), PG 31: 484–89. On the question of authorship see Hippolyte Delehaye, "S. Barlaam. Martyr à Antioch," *Analecta Bollandiana* 22 (1904), 129–46, 136–37.

delivered in his cathedral church, which housed the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, the bishop likewise claimed that silent images functioned like spoken texts, making dead heroes of the faith present to believers and exciting their courage and commitment.⁷⁹

Despite the fact that he was no great appreciator of visual art, and like his predecessors, condemned the veneration of pagan idols in several surviving texts, Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) never actually condemns figurative images as such. In fact, he refers in several places to the existence of specific saints' portraits, not primarily for the purpose of denouncing their misguided veneration, but rather to correct any assumption that they could be accurate historically or realistic likenesses of their models. In his treatise *The Harmony of the Gospels*, Augustine comments that many people believed that Christ wrote directly to Peter and Paul because they had seen depictions of these two apostles with Christ. Those folks fell into error, Augustine insists, because they sought Christ and his apostles on painted walls rather than in the holy Scriptures. Just as bad, the painters had deceived them by suggesting that while Christ lived in the flesh he actually had contact with Paul.⁸⁰

Similarly, in his treatise *On the Trinity*, Augustine mentions portraits of Christ and the apostles and raises the problem of verisimilitude. He comments on the many different representations and then wonders how an artist could hope to fashion a likeness of any individual without having the living model before him? This leads him to muse on the limits of the human imagination and then to propose a non-negotiable detail: that Christ as an incarnate human certainly had a face even if no one could verify which depiction most resembles him. In conclusion, Augustine remains skeptical that any single representation could approach the truth, but says that this really has no bearing on whether or how one can be saved:

Anyone, surely, who has read or heard what the apostle Paul wrote or what was written about him, will fabricate a face for the apostle in his imagination for everybody else whose name is mentioned in these texts. And every one of the vast number of people to whom these writings are known will think of their physical features and lineaments in a different way, and it will be quite impossible to tell whose thoughts are nearest the mark in this respect . . . Even the physical face of the Lord is pictured with infinite variety by countless imaginations, though whatever it was like he

79 Basil, *Homilia* 19, PG 31: 507–26, 507–08.

80 Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum*, ed. Francis Wehrich (Vienna: 1904), 1.10.16.

certainly had only one. Nor as regards the faith we have in the Lord Jesus Christ is it in the least relevant to salvation what our imaginations picture him like, which is probably quite different from the reality . . . What does matter is that we think of him as a man; for we have embedded in us as it were a standard notion of the nature of a man.⁸¹

This statement shows that Augustine accepted what was evidently the simple reality, that biblical scenes along with images of Christ and the saints had come to be a widespread and extremely popular feature for church walls, liturgical implements, or personal devotional objects and that continuing to denounce them would be a waste of effort. When he was countering Faustus the Manichee, he cited the ubiquity of images of Abraham offering Isaac to insist that the man certainly could not be unaware of the patriarch's blameless character.⁸² In a sermon preached at the shrine of St. Stephen at Hippo, Augustine actually praised an illustration of St. Stephen's stoning displayed in that space. He used the image as a visual aid, pointing out Saul, standing at the back of the crowd, holding the cloaks of those who were casting the stones.⁸³

By the early 5th century, the value of religious narrative art for instructing viewers or of portrait images for facilitating prayer or veneration to a saint seems to have been basically approved by many if not most church authorities, despite its potential for prompting adoration on its own terms. This is evident in the writings of Paulinus of Nola (354–431), a friend and correspondent of Augustine, who not only regarded pictorial images of biblical characters and Christian saints as unproblematic but even useful. He commissioned artists to adorn his cathedral church dedicated to St. Felix with images that depicted heroes of the Old Testament as well as portraits of Christian saints. He explicitly denied that such images were sacred in themselves, referring to them as “empty figures,” yet he also regarded them as edifying insofar as they would draw attention of visitors away from feasting and drinking at the martyr Felix's tomb, nurture their faith, and elevate both their comprehension and their piety. He added that the images were accompanied by captions that identified their subject matter, in the event that viewers would otherwise be unable to identify and appreciate them.⁸⁴

81 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, eds. W.J. Mountain and F. Glorie, *CCSL* 50 (Turnhout: 1968), 8.4.7, 276. Trans. Edmund Hill, in *The Works of St. Augustine, a Translation for the 21st Century: The Trinity* (Brooklyn, NY: 1991), 246. Note, Augustine's complaints echo Epiphanius's noted above.

82 Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, ed. Joseph Zycha (Vienna: 1891), 249–797, 22.73.

83 Augustine, *Sermon* 316, *PL* 38: 1431–34, 5.

84 Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, ed. Franz Dolveck, *CCSL* 21 (Turnhout: 2015), 27.511–596.

In a church founded by his friend, Severus, Paulinus appears to have approved the inclusion of St. Martin of Tours's portrait, referring to it as the image of a heavenly man who was worthy of imitation. However, he was less comfortable with Severus's inclusion of Paulinus's own portrait, insisting that he was unworthy of the honor—a lowly figure, shrouded in mental darkness, at best merely a comfort for wretched sinners. Although Paulinus does not explicitly say this, the image probably included the inscription of his name and he offers a poem to accompany the image in which he identifies both Martin and himself as the subjects of the viewer's gaze.⁸⁵

The decorative program of Paulinus's churches was not limited to didactic portrayals of biblical narratives or even inspiring portraits of saints. He also describes the apse of the church he built at Nola as well as one that he established at Fundi. Both of these compositions were planned to symbolically depict the Holy Trinity with figures based upon biblical or other traditional metaphors. The depiction of the Divine Being apparently avoided anthropomorphic or idolatrous iconography by this means. Although neither has survived, based on his recorded verses that were written to offer a verbal description, it is possible to imagine the artwork that adorned the vaults. The apse at Nola was perhaps Paulinus's most vivid commission:

The Trinity shines out in all its mystery. Christ is represented by a lamb, the Father's voice thunders forth from the sky, and the Holy Spirit flows down in the form of a dove. A wreath's gleaming circle surrounds the cross, and around this circle the apostles form a ring, represented by a chorus of doves. The holy unity of the Trinity merges in Christ, but the Trinity has its threefold symbolism. The Father's voice and the Spirit show forth God, the cross and the lamb proclaim the holy victim. The purple and the palm point to kingship and to triumph. Christ himself, the Rock, stands upon the rock of the Church, and from this rock four plashing fountains flow, the evangelists, the living streams of Christ.⁸⁶

Clearly, Paulinus is not worried that these images are in any way inappropriate. He regards them as both edifying and inspirational.

85 Paulinus of Nola, *Epistulae*, ed. Guilelmus de Hartel (Vienna: 1894), 32.2–4.

86 Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 32.10, trans. Patrick Walsh, *Letters of Paulinus of Nola*, vol. 2 (Westminster: 1967), 145. On the apse at Fundi see *Ep.* 32.17.

1.5 *Afterword*

Paulinus's employment of pictorial art for his churches is strong evidence that Christian attitudes toward pictorial art had undergone a marked change from the late 2nd to the early 5th century. The objections of some church officials through the 4th century only indicate the growing presence and popularity of pictorial art for the adornment of churches, shrines, tombs, and domestic spaces. Nevertheless, some church leaders still worried that figurative art was potentially dangerous to members of their congregations who could be susceptible to mistaking the image for the model and thus worshipping pictures or practicing other kinds of idolatrous behaviors. This is what apparently happened in Marseilles, around the turn of the 6th century, when Bishop Serenus apparently destroyed depictions of saints on the walls of a local church. Evidently, Serenus believed that members of the congregation were inappropriately adoring them. In two letters of reprimand, Pope Gregory the Great offered a now-famous defense of the images, saying that though he appreciated Serenus's concern for curbing idolatry, he should not have destroyed the artworks for "a picture is provided in churches for the reason that those who are illiterate may at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books."⁸⁷

For Gregory, as for Paulinus in some respects, the picture served a valuable function, albeit one that was mainly applicable to those who could not read or who were aided by sensible things until they could appreciate or comprehend the more purely intellectual or rational. Yet, by Gregory's time, Christian pictorial art that had been beautifying the great basilicas, liturgical implements, sacred books, and pilgrimage souvenirs since the 4th and 5th centuries was anything but merely didactic or designed for introducing unlearned or uncultivated viewers to the basic biblical stories. The works were, in fact, far more advanced than either the bishops' criticism or defense of them. It would take much more reflection and far more experience of visual art for theologians to construct a theology of visual images that would truly appreciate their complexity of content and the richness of their materials, craft, and style.

87 Gregory the Great, *Ep. 9.209, Registrum Epistularum*, ed. Dag Norberg, CCL 140A (Turnhout: 1982), 768, trans. John Martyn, *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, 3 vols (Toronto: 2004), vol. 2, 674. The Latin reads, "*Idcirco enim pictura in ecclesiis adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt saltem in parietibus uidendo legant, quae legere in codicibus non ualent.*"; see also a later letter from Gregory to Serenus on the same topic, *Ep. 11.10*.

Images in Byzantine Thought and Practice, ca. 500–700

Benjamin Anderson

This title could introduce a number of different essays: first, because Byzantium in the 6th and 7th centuries was marked by multiple changes in the production and status of images; second, because relations between thought and practice can be construed in multiple ways to produce widely divergent histories of the image. Therefore, in order to clarify what the following essay is meant to achieve, I begin with the paths that it does not follow.

To the first point: the period between 500 and 700 witnesses the end of production of statues in the round in the Eastern Roman empire, and the disappearance of monumental public images of ruling emperors.¹ The two phenomena are closely related and arguably of greater import for art and social history than any change involving religious portraiture. Indeed, to judge by the preserved panel paintings, the 6th and 7th centuries were a period of untroubled continuity in the composition and execution of religious portraits.² If scholarship on the period has so often focused on “icons,” this is due not to phenomena of the 6th and 7th centuries, but to the iconoclast controversy of the 8th and 9th centuries. As the present essay appears in a volume devoted to that very controversy, it too adopts a primary focus on the representation of Christ, the Virgin, angels, and saints. But just as those representations did not confront their original viewers in a vacuum, so too will they be considered here alongside various other kinds of images.

To address the second point, the existence of widely divergent histories of the image in this period, let us begin with a deceptively simple question. Were

1 See, respectively, Paolo Liverani, “The Twilight of 3D,” in Troels Myrup Kristensen and Lea Stirling (eds.), *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices* (Ann Arbor: 2016), 310–29; and Benjamin Anderson, “The Disappearing Imperial Statue: Toward a Social Approach,” in Troels Myrup Kristensen and Lea Stirling (eds.), *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices* (Ann Arbor: 2016), 290–309.

2 Thomas F. Mathews and Norman E. Muller, *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Paintings and Icons* (Los Angeles: 2016).

there icons, was there a cult of images, in the two centuries before iconoclasm? This question was debated already during the iconoclast controversy, as various actors sought to prove the antiquity of their own positions. It has been debated again in more recent centuries by scholars whose motivations may be expressed less explicitly but are no less important. It is, namely, evident that one can define the “icon” broadly enough and admit such a variety of evidence for its existence, that the answer is a resounding “yes”; evident, too, that one can define it narrowly enough, and exclude such quantities of evidence, that the answer can only be “no.” The former is the traditional approach, while the latter has been advanced forcefully by multiple scholars since the 1990s.

We can take as representative of the traditional approach an essay published in 1954 by Ernst Kitzinger on “The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm.”³ Kitzinger uses the term “icon” liberally but does not define it. In practice, his topic is the very wide range of functions to which images of Christ, the Virgin, the saints, and angels could be put in the 6th and 7th centuries. Such a broad, implicit definition is entirely defensible with reference to Greek usage, in which εἰκὼν means nothing more (nor less!) than “image.”

To assemble his account, Kitzinger relies on references to images contained within narrative sources, including chronicles, saints’ lives, and didactic tales traditionally dated ca. 550–700. He organizes these anecdotes into four categories according to their primary subjects.⁴ First, images as objects of veneration by means of prayer, kissing, the lighting of candles, and other “devotional practices.” Second, stories about magic, in which the image responds on behalf of its referent, for example by granting a wish, such as the cure of illness, to a faithful devotee; or bleeding or defending itself in response to assault. For Kitzinger, these stories share a “tendency to break down the barrier between image and prototype.”

Kitzinger’s third category comprises the “*palladia*,” or protectors of cities and armies. Like the “magic” images, so too do *palladia* act of behalf of their prototype, differing only in the fact of its collective beneficiary. For example, a text describing the Avar siege of Constantinople in 626 relates that images of the Virgin and Christ were painted on the city gates, and a miraculous icon of Christ was paraded around the walls by the patriarch. This latter was simultaneously an example of Kitzinger’s fourth category, the *acheiropoieta*, or images “not made by human hands.” For example, the Image of Edessa, later known as the Mandyllion, was a miraculous imprint of Christ’s face onto a piece of linen,

3 Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm,” *DOP* 8 (1954), 83–150.

4 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 95–115.

which performed miracles in aid of Edessa's defence during the Persian siege of 544.

According to Kitzinger, these texts taken together demonstrate "a tremendous increase and intensification of the cult of images, beginning in the second half of the 6th century and lasting until the outbreak of iconoclasm."⁵ The increase was driven by practice, and theory scrambled to catch up. The cult of images provoked sporadic criticism and defense, both from within Christianity and without, in the 6th and 7th centuries. While the apologetic texts are never as systematic as those developed in the wake of iconoclasm, they do present "some of the outlines of future theories."⁶

The revisionist approach may be characterized by an essay ("Icons Before Iconoclasm?") published by Leslie Brubaker in 1998.⁷ Brubaker notes just how many stories involve *acheiropoietia*, which she argues should not be seen primarily as icons, but as relics. Brubaker also distinguishes between the general category of "portraits of holy people," on the one hand, set up in for instance narrative scenes, and the specific use of such images as "a transparent window that the viewer looks through rather than at," on the other, images that can therefore act as a channel to the holy subject.⁸ In Brubaker's view, most if not all of the narrative sources taken by Kitzinger to attest this specific use in the 6th and 7th centuries are in fact interpolations: passages introduced into older texts by iconophile partisans seeking to demonstrate the antiquity of their own position. By thus excluding a large body of source material, Brubaker concludes that "the holy portrait became transparent" only in the last quarter of the 7th century.⁹

We will consider both approaches in greater detail below. But it is important to note at the outset that one need not entirely choose between them, since they serve very different functions. The traditional approach, namely, allows Byzantine iconoclasm to be placed within a very long history of religious images, while the revisionist approach guards against an anachronistically "iconophile" history that would retroject the post-Iconoclastic understanding of the religious image into the pre-Iconoclast period. These aims may not directly contradict each other, but they do occupy separate planes. The former has to do with images and how people have related to them through time, the latter with the nature and development of the Eastern Roman state and

5 Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 115.

6 Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 148.

7 Leslie Brubaker, "Icons before Iconoclasm?" in *SSCIS* 45 (Spoleto: 1998), 1215–1254.

8 Brubaker, "Icons," 1216.

9 Brubaker, "Icons," 1251.

religious practice. The run-up to iconoclasm, in other words, reveals fundamental tensions between the discipline of art history, on the one hand, and the discipline of Byzantine studies, on the other.

So long as such tensions are acknowledged they should be productive of knowledge in both arenas. But there is another, less obvious tension at work in the study of religious art in the 6th and 7th centuries. This is between scholars who primarily study the preserved artefacts, and those who seek written sources to illuminate the functions of images. Even Kitzinger, the last scholar to attempt a systematic approach to both the textual and the material evidence for Byzantine art in the 6th and 7th centuries, did so in two separate essays.¹⁰

This essay too will, in its organization, maintain a distinction between images and texts, both because the division is partially constitutive of the “state of the question,” and because the different challenges that attend analysis of the two kinds of evidence are best discussed separately. But in practice it has been difficult to keep preserved images out of the discussion of texts, and written sources out of the discussion of material evidence.

The mutual articulations of text and image are fundamental to the understanding of late Roman and Byzantine art.¹¹ Those complex relationships, however, have played little role in the debate regarding “icons before iconoclasm.” Scholars (both “traditionalists” and “revisionists”) have tended instead to treat the preserved narrative texts as direct proxies for contemporary practice. And yet, as Jaś Elsner rightly remarks, shifts in the level of “textual noise” regarding the cult of images need not (probably do not) directly reflect reality. They could result from any number of different causes: interpolation, yes, but also changing generic conventions and accidents of preservation.¹²

There can be no question of presenting in this essay comprehensive accounts of the preserved texts and images, much less a thorough analysis of their mutual relationships. Instead, its two primary sections are anchored by specific examples whose interpretation necessarily leads to fundamental questions. The first section begins from the canons of the Quinisext Council, and

10 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images”; Ernst Kitzinger, “Byzantine Art in the Period Between Justinian and Iconoclasm,” in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress* (Munich: 1958), IV.1, 1–50.

11 See Michael Squire, *Image and Text in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Cambridge: 2009); Sean Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith in Late Antiquity: Between Reading and Seeing* (Abingdon: 2020); and Ivan Drpić, *Epigram, Art, and Devotion in Later Byzantium* (Cambridge: 2016).

12 Jaś Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium,” *Art Bulletin* 94 (2012), 368–94, here at 372.

proceeds to an extended discussion of the corpus of preserved inscriptions on works of art. The two corpora share the distinct advantage that neither was subject to interpolation. The second presents an analysis of regional variation in the monumental images inside churches in Rome, the north Adriatic, Thessaloniki, Constantinople, and western Asia Minor.

These examples will suffice to introduce the fundamental challenge in relating artistic thought and practice in the 6th and 7th centuries to the emergence of the iconoclastic controversy in the 7th and 8th. It is, namely, necessary to abandon a “line-graph”¹³ approach to the earlier centuries: one that seeks first to chart fluctuations in “the power of images” by collecting attestations in the preserved narrative sources, and then to identify proximate causes for those changes.

This essay adopts instead an approach to the analysis and explanation of cultural phenomena that is rooted in the work of Louis Althusser and Stuart Hall.¹⁴ I assume: first, the relative autonomy (both from each other and from material reality) of specific discourses (in particular those about art and theology, respectively); and second, the lasting impacts on material reality of artistic production.¹⁵ In other words, it is not sufficient to identify an “artistic” phenomenon and seek a “material” cause, both because the discourse of images is potentially (not necessarily) autonomous, and because the making of an image is itself an intervention in material reality.

13 Cf. Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 85: “fever curve.”

14 The most thorough account of Althusser’s work within the context of Byzantine studies remains John Haldon, “‘Jargon’ vs. ‘the Facts’? Byzantine History-Writing and Contemporary Debates,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 9 (1984/85), 95–132, here at 106–107 and at 111–112. More recently, Althusser has attained a limited prominence in Roman and late Roman history, primarily via Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: 2000), 19–21; and note Ioannis Stouraitis, “Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach,” *BZ* 107 (2014), 175–220. Ando and Stouraitis are exclusively concerned with Althusser’s essay on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” whereas I am exclusively concerned with the earlier essays collected in *For Marx*, in particular the critique of the base-superstructure model and the concept of overdetermination. My primary route into this material is the critical reading of Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies 1983: A Theoretical History*, ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack and Lawrence Grossberg (Durham: 2016), especially Lectures 5 and 6.

15 Or, in brief, “the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity”: Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: 2005), 111.

1 Texts

In 692, Emperor Justinian II convened a council of bishops in *Trullo*, a domed hall in the imperial palace in Constantinople.¹⁶ The assembly approved 102 canons supplementary to the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils, whence “Quinisext,” the meeting’s customary name. Many canons address issues of episcopal organization and ecclesiastical discipline that resulted from the territorial contraction of the Roman state in the 7th century. Others address the behavior of the laity, mostly in proscriptive fashion; for example, those who play dice (Canon 50), or who light fires in front of their houses on the first of the month (Canon 65), are threatened with excommunication. Three canons deal specifically with images: a new topic in the history of the ecumenical councils, all the more noteworthy for its temporal proximity to the beginnings of iconoclasm.

Canon 73 forbids the decoration of floors with the sign of the cross, and canon 100 forbids the production of erotic pictures. The lion’s share of scholarly discussion, however, has been devoted to Canon 82, “That artists (ζωγράφους) are not to portray the Forerunner pointing to a lamb,” here in full as translated by Michael Featherstone:

In some depictions of the venerable images (ἐν τισι τῶν σεπτῶν εἰκόνων γραφαῖς), the Forerunner is portrayed pointing with his finger to a lamb, and this has been accepted as a representation of grace, prefiguring for us through the law the true Lamb, Christ our God. Venerating, then, these ancient representations and foreshadowings as symbols and prefigurations of truth handed down by the Church, nevertheless, we prefer grace and truth, which we have received as fulfilment of the law. Therefore, in order that what is perfect, even in paintings, may be portrayed before the eyes of all, we decree that henceforth the figure of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Christ our God, should be set forth in images in human form, instead of the ancient lamb; for in this way we apprehend the depth of the humility of the Word of God, and are led to the remembrance of his life in the flesh, his passion and saving death, and of the redemption which thereby came to the world.¹⁷

16 For the council and its subsequent reception, see Heinz Ohme, *Concilium Quinisextum: Das Konzil Quinisextum*, (Fontes Christiani) 12 (Turnhout: 2006).

17 George Nedungatt and Michael Featherstone (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited* (Rome: 1995), 162–64.

Let us pose two questions regarding this canon. First, does it demonstrate that the Church sought to control the production of art? Second, does it respond to a sudden shift in the social function of images, or does it rather result from a long-term evolution? Consideration of both questions leads to key controversies in the contemporary scholarly discussion of “icons before iconoclasm.”

To the *first question*, whether Canon 82 demonstrates that the Church sought to control the production of art, an affirmative answer has been offered by Charles Barber:

the canon not only recognizes the theological import of the icon, it at the same time introduces a need to police the visual. The canon does not simply privilege one iconography, it also argues that a second iconography be removed. One might suggest that this iconophile text also introduces the possibility of Christian iconoclasm.¹⁸

The text of the canon does not advocate removal, much less destruction, of images. Indeed, it explicitly describes those images that depict the Forerunner accompanied by a lamb as “venerable” (σέπτος could also be translated “august”), and states that the bishops continue to “venerate” them (κατασπάζομαι could also mean “embrace,” “kiss,” or “do homage to”). The canon merely recommends that future artists – to whom the agency is explicitly granted – adopt a different approach. Even then, and in distinction to many other canons of the Quinisext, it does not conclude with threats of excommunication against violators. Still, as the canon expresses a preference for one kind of picture over another, it should provide some insight into episcopal attitudes toward Christian art at the close of the 7th century.

To begin, the bishops both assume the legitimacy of representations of Christ, and register an awareness of their variety, responsibility for which they attribute to artists. The canon is thus a specific intervention in practice, not unlike that which proscribes lighting fires on the first of the month, with the difference that it expresses respect for the practice in question. The reality of the practice may be independently verified, as one preserved object does depict John the Baptist presenting the lamb of Christ: an ivory panel set in the “Cathedra of Maximian” (Bishop of Ravenna, 546–556) (Figure 2.1).¹⁹ But if the

18 Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: 2002), 46.

19 Even here, John does not point at, but holds forth a medallion containing the lamb. On the cathedra, Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, *Ravenna in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: 2010), 214–18.

bishops considered this the primary context in which the Agnus Dei appeared, the art historian can cite many more monuments that show the lamb independent of a gesturing Baptist. Sixth-century examples include sarcophagi and mosaic programs from Ravenna, the mosaics of St. Catherine's in Sinai, and the Cross of Justin II (Figure 2.2); a (possibly) 7th-century example is the "Cathedra of St. Mark" in Venice.²⁰ The bishops have a certain familiarity with artistic practice, but it is not comprehensive, nor even representative.

What are the terms by which the bishops assess representations of Christ? The language of Canon 82 bears no trace of the Christological refinements that had been achieved by the ecumenical councils, and to which the 8th-century controversy around images would have frequent recourse.²¹ Rather, as André Grabar observed, it appeals to "the traditional theological antithesis between 'shadow' and 'truth'."²² The text of Paul is sufficient to explain its underlying logic: "Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year" (Heb. 10:1). If this canon imagines an opponent, it is not the Monophysite or the Monothelete (e.g.), but the figure of the "Jew." To quote Grabar again, "it applies to the domain of images the general program that the Quinisext set for itself: to efface the last remnants of the errors of the Jews and of the pagans."²³ To this end, it employs a rhetoric that had already appeared in an epigram composed around the year 600: "On Easter. Christ abolished the lamb of the law, and provided an immortal sacrifice, Himself the priest and Himself the victim."²⁴

Canons 73 and 100 of the Quinisext, which also concern art, are equally limited in scope and traditional in rhetoric. Canon 73, "That the signs of the cross must not be set into the floor," seeks to prevent desecration, "in order that the trophy of our victory may not be insulted by the trampling feet of those who

20 Klaus Wessel, "Agnus Dei," in *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, vol. 1, ed. Klaus Wessel (Stuttgart: 1966), 90–94.

21 Pace Barber, *Likeness*, 46–47. The same study (especially at 61–81) provides an excellent account of the Christological terms of the 8th-century controversy, but I do not agree that those can be read back into Canon 82.

22 André Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin: Le dossier archéologique* (Paris: 1984), 96: "l'antithèse théologique traditionnelle: 'ombre-vérité'."

23 Grabar, *Iconoclasme*, 95: "il s'agit d'une application au domaine des images du programme général que le Quinisexte s'était tracé: effacer les derniers restes des erreurs des Juifs (et des païens)."

24 *Anthologia Palatina*, 1.53; trans. William R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: 1916), 29. For the date see Marc D. Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres* (Wiener Byzantinische Studien) xxiv/1 (Vienna: 2003), 357–61.



FIGURE 2.1 John the Baptist and the lamb of Christ, the cathedra of Maximian, Museo Arcivescovile, Ravenna

PHOTO: ALFREDO DAGLI ORTI, DE AGOSTINI EDITORE

walk upon it.”²⁵ Canon 73 is more severe than Canon 82, demanding removal of crosses previously executed, and threatening violators with excommunication.

25 Trans. Featherstone, in Nedungatt and Featherstone, *Council in Trullo*, 155.



FIGURE 2.2 Reverse, cross of Justin II ("Crux Vaticana"), S. Pietro in Vaticano, Rome. Stefano Borgia, *De cruce Vaticana* (Rome: 1779)

Only lay violators are imagined; there is not, as in other canons, a parallel threat of defrocking for clergy. As with the representation of the lamb of God, the setting of crosses in floors is amply attested in preserved monuments.²⁶ Notably, an imperial constitution issued 250 years earlier had ordered "that no one may carve or paint a sign (*signum*) of the Savior Christ in earth, in stone,

26 Erich Dinkler and Erika Dinkler-von Schubert, "Kreuz, I. Teil: K. vorikonoklastisch," in Marcell Restle (ed.), *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, vol. v (Stuttgart: 1995), 2–219, here at 107–13.

or in marble placed on the ground (*humi positis*).²⁷ Heinz Ohme understands Canon 73 as a repetition of this earlier decree, issued to compensate for the reduction in territory covered by Roman civil law.²⁸

Canon 100, “That those things which incite pleasures are not to be portrayed on panels (ἐν πίναξι),” does not further specify the content of the pictures that “corrupt the mind and incite the flames of shameful passion.”²⁹ It may refer to mythological representations, such as the early 7th-century silver dish (613–30) on which a youthful Meleager poses nude with spear (Figure 2.3), or the mid-7th-century silver flask (641–51) on which undraped nereids frolic in the sea.³⁰ However, both the language of the canon and the explicit reference to “panels” recall a 6th-century epigram by Agathias on an encaustic portrait of the courtesan Kallirhoe. The poet writes that the painter, one Thomas, displayed “what great desire he has in his soul; for even as his wax melts, so melts his heart.”³¹ Nor is this the only reference to the genre. Averil Cameron concludes that such pictures “lined the streets” of 6th-century Constantinople “like modern theatre posters.”³² Perhaps enough of them remained in the 7th century to provoke the ire of the assembled bishops.

In summary: Canon 82, like the other two canons on art approved by the Quinisext, exhibits familiarity with contemporary artistic practice. However, it does not advance a general account of the function of art as such. Indeed, the bishops do not treat art as a serious theological concern, subject to rigorous application of Christological distinctions. Instead, they concede the primary responsibility for its execution to the laity and intervene only to evaluate specific phenomena (as elsewhere in the canons the throwing of dice or the training of bears) on the basis of rudimentary principles. The canons on art are reactive and (one fears) arbitrary; they provide a glimpse of a diverse set of practices, but make no effort to comprehend them as a whole.

27 *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. Paul Krueger, vol. 2 of *Corpus iuris civilis* (11th ed., Berlin: 1929), 1.8.1; trans. Fred H. Blume, in Bruce W. Frier (ed.), *The Codex of Justinian*, 3 vols (Cambridge: 2016), 226–229 (modified).

28 Ohme, *Concilium Quinisextum*, 105–6.

29 Trans. Featherstone, in Nedungatt and Featherstone, *Council in Trullo*, 180–181.

30 Ohme, *Concilium Quinisextum*, 63, argues for a mythological referent. The dish and flask, dated by silver stamps, are both today in the Hermitage. See recently, Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Road to Byzantium: Luxury Arts of Antiquity* (London: 2006), cat. nos. 82 and 87; foundationally, Erica Cruikshank Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (Washington: 1961), cat. nos. 57 and 75.

31 *Anth. Plan.* 80; trans. W. R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 5 (London: 1926), 201.

32 Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford: 1970), 23.



FIGURE 2.3 Meleager and Atalanta, silver dish, the Hermitage

Still, the fact remains that the council saw fit to address art at all, in contrast to previous ecumenical assemblies. *Second question*: Did their attention respond to a sudden shift in the social function of images, or did it result from a long-term development?

Scholarly responses to this question are closely tied to the discussion of “icons before iconoclasm,” which has already been invoked in the introduction to this essay. Accordingly, Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, as advocates of the “revisionist” point of view, argue that Canon 82 “coincides with a new understanding of the holy portrait ... It is during the last decades of the seventh century that holy portraits seem to have been absorbed into the cult of saints, and to have been widely recognised as mediators between humanity and divinity.”³³ Brubaker and Haldon attribute the new role of images to “late seventh-century

33 Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850* (Cambridge, Eng.: 2011), 61–62.

insecurities" (especially regarding military defeats at the hands of the Arabs), which provoked a need for "new channels of access to divinity."³⁴

Ernst Kitzinger, by contrast, represents the "traditionalist" view by situating Canon 82 within a longer-term development, indeed as confirmation of *faits accomplis*. "At the time when it was formulated Christian art had long passed from the symbolic to the direct representation of holy persons. In this respect the Canon is nothing more than a recognition of an accomplished fact."³⁵ For Kitzinger, "practice ... took a decisive lead," as "the Christian image began to assume a role more central, a function more vital in everyday life" between the reigns of Justinian I and Leo III.³⁶ The result was "a tremendous increase and intensification of the cult of images, beginning in the second half of the sixth century and lasting until the outbreak of Iconoclasm."³⁷

Both positions rely on a set of texts that were gathered by Kitzinger, who explicitly preferred narrative sources (especially historiography, hagiography, didactic tales, and pilgrims' accounts) to other genres: "The chief interest these stories have for us ... lies precisely in the information they impart, almost incidentally, about every-day practices and beliefs concerning images."³⁸ Brubaker and Haldon argue that many stories dated by Kitzinger between the late 6th and early 8th centuries were in fact composed during the iconoclastic controversy.

Take, for example, an account transmitted with the so-called *Pratum Spirituale*, a collection of stories about ascetics attributed to John Moschos (d. 634?). The title – like those of many similarly malleable "texts" – circulated with collections of varying lengths and contents.³⁹ In Kitzinger's paraphrase, the story tells of

a hermit who, before undertaking a journey, was in the habit of praying to an image of the Virgin and Child, which he had in his cave, and of lighting a candle before it. He would ask the Virgin not only to grant him a prosperous journey, but also to look after the candle during his absence. As a

34 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 777 and 782. The psychologizing language is shared with Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Bristol: 2012), e.g. at 17 ("anxiety and insecurity") and 18 ("spiritual crisis and insecurities").

35 Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 142.

36 Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 87.

37 Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 115.

38 Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 96.

39 A point acknowledged already by Byzantine authors and by Kitzinger. Philip Pattenden, "The Text of the 'Pratum Spirituale,'" *The Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 26 (1975), 38–54; Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 97.

result he always found it burning on his return even if he had stayed away as long as six months.⁴⁰

On the basis of this and similar stories, Kitzinger concludes that “images of Christ, the Virgin, and the Saints became common in the domestic sphere” in the later sixth and seventh centuries.⁴¹

Brubaker, by contrast, considers that this story is likely a later addition to the collection: “since the passage appears to have been unknown to John of Damascus ... it is highly suspect.” As its first citation outside of the *Pratum Spirituale* appears in the acts of the Second Council of Nicaea, it speaks instead to the concerns of the later 8th century.⁴² Brubaker repeatedly applies the same principle to other texts: thus e.g. one of the miracles appended to the life of St. Symeon the Younger (itself composed ca. 600), in which a citizen of Antioch displays a portrait of the saint surrounded by lights and curtains. The story is first attested outside the miracles in a work by John of Damascus; therefore, it speaks to the situation “in the 730s.”⁴³ In this manner, Brubaker refers a host of sources previously associated with the 6th and 7th centuries to the 8th instead, and re-dates the intensification of the cult of images to “circa 680.”⁴⁴

It is useful to take a critical approach to the textual sources for the veneration of images. Admittedly, few narratives of (e.g.) military or administrative history could stand if their sources were held to the same standard of independent attestation, but there is reason to believe that sources about images in particular were subject to intensive revision and interpolation.⁴⁵ More importantly, we may question both Kitzinger’s initial impulse, and its perpetuation by Brubaker and Haldon, to chart the course of the “cult of images” on the basis of stray mentions in narrative sources. As Elsner remarks, such texts provide a very indirect proxy for practice: “It is possible there was no rise in the cult of images, just a rise in the textual noise about the cult in the materials that have survived to us.”⁴⁶

40 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 97. There is no critical edition of the *Pratum Spirituale*. For a Greek text of this tale (“Chapter 180”), see PG 87/3: 3052; for an English translation, see John Moschos, *The Spiritual Meadow*, trans. John Wortley (Collegeville: 1992), 149–150.

41 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 98.

42 Brubaker, “Icons,” 1243.

43 Brubaker, “Icons,” 1245–1246.

44 Brubaker, “Icons,” 1253.

45 Consider, however, as a caution against excessive scepticism in the assessment of Kitzinger’s source material, Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), Translated Texts for Historians 68 (Liverpool: 2018), 1.240–48. Price explicitly defends the authenticity of the story from the life of St. Symeon the Younger.

46 Elsner, “Iconoclasm as Discourse,” 372.

An alternative body of textual evidence has barely been exploited: the inscriptions on images – whether preserved with the accompanying monuments or independently transmitted – produced between ca. 500 and 700. This is a substantial dossier, which includes: the epigrams on monuments to the charioteer Porphyrius, dated to ca. 500;⁴⁷ the texts that appear within the mosaics of various Roman churches, beginning with ss. Cosma e Damiano (526–30) and extending to the chapel of ss. Primo e Feliciano (642–49);⁴⁸ the epigrams in the Cycle of Agathias, composed between the 530s and the 560s;⁴⁹ the epigrams preserved within the *Palatine Anthology* (1.37–49 and 52–77), composed ca. 600;⁵⁰ the inscriptions on the early 7th-century mosaics of Hagios Demetrios;⁵¹ the epigrams of George of Pisidia, composed in the 620s and ‘30s;⁵² and the inscriptions of the Koimesis Church in Nicaea, which dates to ca. 700.⁵³

To state the obvious: the inscriptions preserved on the monuments cannot be interpolations. The manuscript collections of epigrams could theoretically have been subject to interpolation, but there is no reason to think that they were. Moreover, as sources on 6th- and 7th-century attitudes toward art, the inscriptions have two additional advantages over the narratives collected by Kitlinger. First, they were composed for public display, and included among their readers the very artists who fashioned them, letter by letter, in mosaic, stone, paint, metal, and ivory, etc. In this sense they provide a meeting point between commentators on art, its makers, and its viewers. Second, they forge connections between the figures represented in images and those who view them, in particular through the adoption of varied forms of address. Both points are germane to the longevity of the developments to which Canon 82 responds.

47 Alan Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford: 1973).

48 Collected in an appendix to Eric Thunø, *The Apse Mosaic in Early Medieval Rome: Time, Network, and Repetition* (Cambridge: 2015).

49 Cameron, *Agathias*; and Alan Cameron, *The Greek Anthology: from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford, 1993).

50 Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 357–61.

51 Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*, (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung) 1 (Vienna: 2009), 385–390; and Franz Alto Bauer, *Eine Stadt und ihr Patron: Thessaloniki und der Heilige Demetrios* (Regensburg: 2013), 198–215.

52 Luigi Tartaglia (ed.), *Carmi di Giorgio di Pisidia* (Turin: 1998), 467–505; Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 334–37.

53 Andreas Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein*, (Byzantinische Epigramme in inschriftlicher Überlieferung) 3,1 (Vienna: 2014), 700–701.

First advantage: the inscriptions engage readers and makers in a dialogue about the abilities and limits of the visual arts. For example, two of the epigrams on the preserved monuments of the charioteer Porphyrius, ca. 500, distinguish what art can and cannot do: the artist has captured the athlete's likeness, but not his skill.⁵⁴ Notably, and as if in response, epigrams from later in the 6th century consider the means by which art can, in fact, represent the incorporeal. Thus in Agathias's epigram on Thomas's painting of the beautiful Kallirhoe, cited above, the melting of the artist's wax displays the heat of his desire.⁵⁵ Or take two of the four epigrams on images of archangels, one by Neilos and another again by Agathias. In both, the material image of the incorporeal being succeeds by leading the mind of the viewer to a higher contemplation; and for Agathias, "art can convey by colours the prayers of the soul."⁵⁶

Brubaker concedes that this last epigram "approach[es] the idea of a transparent holy portrait," but argues that it appears "in isolation"; its recognition of the ability of images to mediate between the viewer and the figure represented "was not part of an apparently widespread belief system."⁵⁷ But it was only one of many contemporary epigrams that explored the capacities and limitations of visual art. These in turn engaged with a much older tradition of Greek poetry. Specific works of art – for example, Myron's sculpture of a cow, and Apelles's painting of *Aphrodite Anadyomene* – inspired long series of epigrams, beginning in the Hellenistic era and extending into the 6th century, and repeatedly "blurring ... image and prototype."⁵⁸

In short, the "revisionist" approach to the question of "icons before iconoclasm" misses the forest for the trees. The modern scholarly demand for multiple explicit acknowledgments of one capacity of art, mediation between the

54 *Anth. Plan.* 342 and 352. Cameron, *Porphyrius*, 84–85, cites other contemporary poetic expressions of the same topos ("would that the craftsman could copy more than just his/her physical beauty").

55 *Anth. Plan.* 80. On the complex erotics of this poem, see Steven D. Smith, *Greek Epigram and Byzantine Culture: Gender, Desire, and Denial in the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: 2019), 106–108.

56 *Anth. Pal.* 1.34 and 1.35; trans. Paton, *Greek Anthology*, 1, 23. The latter epigram, by Agathias, further plays on the medium of wax, and its ability to receive an imprint. See discussion of these and two other archangel epigrams by Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley: 2001), 95–98.

57 Brubaker, "Icons," 1226 and 1253.

58 Michael Squire, "Making Myron's Cow Moo? Ecphrastic Epigram and the Poetics of Simulation," *American Journal of Philology* 131 (2010), 589–634; Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: 2011), esp. at 180–193 – the quote at 193, referring to a 6th-century epigram by Julian of Egypt (*Anth. Plan.* 181).

human and the divine, can indeed be met by the preserved epigrams. But more to the point, that demand obscures the forest: a sophisticated and widely disseminated discourse within which art's multiple capacities had already been many times entertained, dismissed, and asserted once more.

Second advantage: the inscriptions actively forge connections between viewers and the figures represented in images, in particular through the adoption of varied forms of address. Paolo Liverani, in a study of a slightly earlier corpus, supplies a useful typology of those forms, all of which appear still in the inscriptions of the 6th and 7th centuries.⁵⁹ Type A: both speaker and addressee are external to the image. In this case the address can be either impersonal, relating a state of affairs ("No longer do the Magi bring presents to Fire and the Sun; for this Child made Sun and Fire");⁶⁰ or personal, directing the viewer's attention to a particular aspect of the image ("You look on a golden roof with heavenly apex and a starry face shining with brilliant light").⁶¹ Type B, of particular interest to us: an external speaker addresses a figure within the image. For example, an epigram on a painting in Ephesus: "Forgive us, O Archangel, for picturing thee, for thy face is invisible; this is but an offering of men."⁶² Type C: a figure within the image addresses the viewer. This is the case with Thomas's favorite courtesan, who declares "I am Kallirhoe the versatile."⁶³ Type D, a dialogue between two figures within the image: for example, between Abraham and Melchisedech (*Anth. Pal.* 1.66).

The appearance of all four forms of address in the epigrams of the 6th and 7th centuries is itself noteworthy. Images were both surrounded by and engaged in conversation. People talked about pictures and to pictures; pictures talked to people and to themselves. The boundaries between viewers and images were porous and crossed repeatedly. The multiple forms of address may have been rooted, like the discussion of art's capacities, in much older traditions. However, Liverani characterizes the employment of all four on public monuments, which were previously accompanied only by the impersonal variety of Type A, as a specifically late antique development.⁶⁴

59 Paolo Liverani, "Chi parla a chi? Epigrafia monumentale e immagine pubblica in epoca tardoantica," in Stine Birk, Troels Myrup Kristensen, and Birte Poulsen (eds.), *Using Images in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: 2014), 3–32.

60 *Anth. Pal.* 1.41; trans. Paton, *Greek Anthology*, 1, 25.

61 In the chapel of ss. Primo e Feliciano in S. Stefano Rotondo, Rome: Thunø, *Apse Mosaic*, 214.

62 *Anth. Pal.* 1.36; trans. Paton, *Greek Anthology* 1, 23.

63 *Anth. Plan.* 80; trans. Paton, *Greek Anthology* 5, 201.

64 Liverani, "Chi parla a chi?," 9–10.

Within this diversity of modes, the frequent appearance of Type B, in which an external speaker addresses a figure within the image, deserves special attention. An inscription of this kind provoked a specific response: the viewer stands before the image, reads aloud what is written, and by consequence addresses the figure represented.⁶⁵ The content of the utterance is secondary, although certainly of interest. It may acknowledge the inadequacy of the representation to the topic, as in the Ephesian painting of the archangel; it may relate a Biblical truth (“into the Virgin’s womb thou didst descend with noiseless tread,” on a painting of Christ’s birth);⁶⁶ or it may express thanks for past assistance and hopes for aid to be supplied in future.⁶⁷ But in all cases the viewer addresses the being while confronting its image.⁶⁸

Consider, for example, an ivory today in the British Museum, which depicts an archangel standing before an arch and atop a flight of stairs (Figure 2.4). Much about this object is uncertain: its place and date of manufacture (on grounds of style, most scholars opt for Constantinople in the 6th century), and its contexts both proximate (this is likely only one leaf of a diptych, whose pendant would also have borne images) and social (did an emperor own it?). What is nevertheless certain is that a person who picks up and considers this object is compelled to sound out the words of the inscription – “Receive the suppliant before you, despite his sinfulness”⁶⁹ – thus initiating a prayerful dialogue with the archangel while gazing upon his image. The invitation to dialogue is reinforced by the composition. The angel’s wings, spear, and orb are placed before the arch’s columns, and his feet spill down the steps, the toes projecting in highest relief, as if poised to step into our world.

The second-person inscriptions provide evidence, stronger still than the stories collected by Kitzinger, of a widespread cultural understanding that an image can – to borrow the formulation of Brubaker and Haldon – “serve as

65 For the Byzantine tendency to read inscriptions out loud, see Amy Papalexandrou, “Text in Context: Eloquent Monuments and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Word & Image* 17 (2001), 259–283.

66 *Anth. Pal.* 1.37; trans. Paton, *Greek Anthology* 1, 23.

67 For an example of the former, see the mosaic of the Virgin, Christ, and St. Theodore in Hagios Demetrios: Bauer, *Eine Stadt*, 210–11. For an example of the latter, see the epigram of the abbot Hyakinthos in the Koimesis Church, Nicaea: Rhoby, *Epigramme auf Stein*, 700–701.

68 Similarly, Liverani, “Chi parla a chi?,” 26; Leatherbury, “Reading and Seeing,” 142–43.

69 See the catalog entries by Antony Eastmond in David Buckton (ed.), *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture* (London: 1994), 73–74; and Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki (eds.), *Byzantium, 330–1453* (London: 2008), 383. The latter supplies alternative, less convincing, translations.



FIGURE 2.4 Archangel, ivory plaque, the British Museum

an intermediary between the viewer and the holy person represented.”⁷⁰ This understanding was available well before 680: certainly by the 6th century, and

⁷⁰ Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 50–51.

probably much earlier. Indeed, rather than pose a choice between Kitzinger's tipping point (ca. 550) and Brubaker and Haldon's (ca. 680), we should consider the address to an agent through its representation as a near constant in the long-term history of Greco-Roman art.

Brubaker and Haldon's focus on 7th-century anxieties does, however, provide a potential explanation of the conciliar decision to acknowledge this desire after centuries of episcopal silence. Most of the canons of the Quinisext respond to the military crises of the 7th century, whether directly (by addressing e.g. the responsibilities of bishops unable to take up their sees) or indirectly (by attempting to cleanse the community of Christians of their many errors, and bring them back in the favor of a vengeful deity). Perhaps it is within this latter context that the bishops affirmed some very basic facts about images. Pictures of Christ are good, best of all in human form – like, indeed, those miraculous images that had saved the cities of Constantinople and Edessa from attacking armies. Pictures that incite lust are bad. People should not tread on the sign of the cross. But these are limited interventions, which explicitly establish art as the responsibility of artists in particular and the laity in general; and which betray no knowledge of, much less interest in, the sophisticated, self-sustaining discourse about art that we glimpse through the epigrams.

A picture emerges of two semi-autonomous spheres, that of the bishops at the council on the one hand, and that of the making and viewing of art on the other; two spheres that are not so much antagonistic as barely connected.⁷¹ It is not the same picture evoked by Hans Belting, when he proposes that “the theology of images ... always had a practical end in view. It supplied the unifying formulas for an otherwise heterogeneous, undisciplined use of images.”⁷² The bishops had practical ends in view, but they did not seek unifying formulas in the 6th and 7th centuries, as they would in the 8th and 9th; and the discourse of images was various, but not undisciplined. It developed according to its own parameters, which we have begun to discern through the epigrams, and will explore further when we turn to the monuments.

Nor is it the picture evoked by Kitzinger, who sought in texts about images “spontaneous expressions of popular beliefs.”⁷³ The distinction between the

71 It is necessary to resist “the reduction of *all* the elements that make up the concrete life of a historical epoch (economic, social, political, and legal institutions, customs, ethics, art, religion, philosophy, and even historical *events*: wars, battles, defeats, and so on) to *one* principle of internal unity.” Althusser, *For Marx*, 103 (emphasis in original).

72 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: 1994), 3.

73 Kitzinger, “Cult of Images,” 102.

two spheres is not one between the elite and the popular. Many of the bishops at the Quinisext will have commissioned images themselves, and many more will have pondered the significance of the images that they encountered. It is rather a question of distinct competencies. In the 6th and 7th centuries, the literate, critical discourse about art that first arose in the pre-Christian Greco-Roman world had already been honed through centuries of engagement with official, public Christianity. It was perfectly competent to its task, just as the bishops were to theirs.

The relative autonomy of the discourse of images and the discourse of theology in the sixth and seventh centuries applies also in the opposite direction. Just as theology did not deal directly with images, neither did images deal directly with theology. What, in fact, was the primary concern of images? This question that can only be answered by reference to the preserved artefacts, and it is to these that we turn in the next section.

2 Images

The material remains of 6th- and 7th-century artistic production in the Roman-Byzantine world are many and various. They extend from the *disiecta membra* that wash up in museums, bereft of their original contexts, such as the archangel ivory discussed above; through objects and structures uncovered in excavations, accompanied by varying degrees of contextual documentation; all the way up to monuments in continuous use since the era, nearly all of them religious in function. Different categories of object are susceptible to different methods of study. All are suitable to visual analysis, the art historian's stock-in-trade. Even unprovenanced objects can yield contextual data, including date of manufacture and varieties of use, through materials analysis. The careful, stratigraphic excavation of sites and buildings provides substantially more data about use and (above all) deposition. Monuments in continuous use, finally, both enable architectural study, and are often accompanied by traditions whose critical analysis may yield genuine historical data.

Study of this material, under the various rubrics of "Christian archaeology," "early Christian art," "classical archaeology," and "late antique art," etc., has been underway for centuries, and has generated a massive secondary literature. However, the discussion of "icons before iconoclasm" has, with notable exceptions, drawn on these resources sparingly, preferring the analysis of texts. Perhaps the underlying assumption is that actual images primarily speak to questions of style and iconography, while only texts can speak to function; but this can easily be disproven.

The most straightforward counterexample concerns the presentation of gifts to and lighting of candles before images. As we have seen, Brubaker and Haldon seek to postdate various texts that describe the practice. They furthermore claim that “a fragmentary wall painting in Alexandria provides our only material evidence for the potential veneration of images before the end of the seventh century.” The painting, which depicts the Virgin and Child accompanied by an archangel and a donor, was dated by its excavator to the 6th century and was accompanied by “two metal hooks that apparently allowed oil lamps to be suspended in front of the painting. This suggests the honouring of sacred portraits with lights, a practice that we do not find attested in the written source material until the late seventh century.”⁷⁴ Two studies by Per Jonas Nordhagen supply additional physical evidence both for the presentation to images of “votive gifts” (metal crosses e.g.) and for the lighting of flames in front of images. Nordhagen suggests “that such illumination not only played a part in the cult of images around A.D. 700, but that, at that time, it was a devotional practice which had a solid tradition behind it.”⁷⁵

Nordhagen’s evidence is drawn entirely from churches in the city of Rome, mostly from Santa Maria Antiqua; monuments that play only a subordinate role in Brubaker and Haldon’s analyses.⁷⁶ To be sure, there is also material evidence for the hanging of lamps before images in 6th-century Constantinople: the relief busts of Christ, the Virgin, and the apostles excavated from the site of Hagios Polyeuktos were fitted with holes “meant to receive a bronze pin or hook for hanging a lamp.”⁷⁷

Nevertheless, and tellingly, this first example of the varieties of evidence supplied by preserved images leads already to the question of regional variation: were icons more intensively venerated in Rome than in the east? Indeed, Brubaker and Haldon propose, on the basis of the texts, “that religious images

74 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 776–777.

75 Per Jonas Nordhagen, “Icons Designed for the Display of Sumptuous Votive Gifts,” *DOP* 41 (1987), 453–460; Per Jonas Nordhagen, “In Praise of Archaeology: Icons Before Iconoclasm,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 60 (2010), 101–113, quote at 108.

76 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, e.g. at 218–19 – an account of “Artisanal production under Constantine v” introduces paintings from Santa Maria Antiqua only as comparanda to date an icon from Sinai, not as subjects of analysis in their own right. Brubaker has argued cogently against “subsuming S. Maria Antiqua into the paradigm of Byzantine art history” – but surely it should still be included! Leslie Brubaker, “100 Years of Solitude: Santa Maria Antiqua and the History of Byzantine Art History,” in John Osborne, J. Rasmus Brandt, and Giuseppe Morganti (eds.), *Santa Maria Antiqua al Foro Romano: Cento anni dopo* (Rome: 2004), 41–47; quote at 46.

77 Matthews, *Dawn of Christian Art*, 177.

were either more important to the early medieval Latin than to the early Byzantine world or that it was more acceptable to speak of images in terms that were normally used for relics in the west than it was in the east.”⁷⁸

The following account explores regional differences in the composition, execution, and display of images in the churches of the 6th and 7th centuries. Analysis of churches in Rome and the northern Adriatic, on the one hand, and in Thessaloniki, on the other, reveals an underlying similarity of function. The two regions developed distinct visual strategies to address a shared purpose: namely, to express and to forge relations between living individuals and divine beings. Only in Constantinople and western Asia Minor do we find evidence for images that served a robustly didactic, theological purpose: namely, to express the nature of Christ.

In Rome, the 6th century is marked by two simultaneous and closely related innovations: the representation of living bishops in the apses of the churches whose construction they sponsored, and the use of symmetrical arrays of standing figures to express the relationship between the human and the divine.⁷⁹ We know little of earlier portraits of bishops, and before the 6th century we know only representations of Christ and the apostles in apses: no saints, much less living bishops.⁸⁰ We should imagine, then, that the appearance of three saints and of bishop Felix IV (526–30) in the apse mosaic of ss. Cosma e Damiano – a

78 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 56 fn. 227. Bissera Pentcheva draws a similar distinction between image-based worship in Rome and relic-based worship in Constantinople: *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: 2006), 48.

79 See especially Thunø, *Apse Mosaic*; Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge: 2009), 271–278; Paolo Liverani, “The Memory of the Bishop in the Early Christian Basilica,” in Mariëtte Verhoeven, Lex Bosman, and Hanneke van Asperen (eds.), *Monuments & Memory: Christian Cult Buildings and Constructions of the Past* (Turnhout: 2016), 185–97; Dale Kinney, “Communication in a Visual Mode: Papal Apse Mosaics,” *Journal of Medieval History* 44 (2018), 311–32; Benjamin Anderson, “Images Down Low,” in Sabine Feist (ed.), *Transforming Sacred Spaces: New Approaches to Byzantine Ecclesiastical Architecture from the Transitional Period* (Wiesbaden: 2020), 161–187, here at 165–170.

80 For the scant evidence of early episcopal portraiture, see Alan Cameron, “A Quotation from S. Nilus of Ancyra in an Iconodule Tract?,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976), 128–31. For a chart analysing the components of early apse decorations, see J.-M. Spieser, “The Representation of Christ in the Apses of Early Christian Churches,” *Gesta* 37 (1998), 63–73, Figure. 2.1. On the 6th-century appearance of martyrs, and one possible 5th-century exception, see Christa Ihm, *Die Programme der christlichen Apsismalerei vom vierten Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des achten Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: 1960), 113.



FIGURE 2.5 Apse mosaic, ss. Cosma e Damiano, Rome. Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom VI. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1916), Taf. 102

church positioned prominently on the Roman Forum – provoked questions.⁸¹ Both the composition of the image – a symmetrical array – and the accompanying inscription provide partial answers (Figure 2.5).

The mosaic depicts, at center, Christ: he alone is nimbed, and elevated above the ground on which the remaining six figures stand. To either side appear Paul and Peter, both gazing outward and gesturing with raised hand toward Christ as if (in the exterior logic of the mosaic) presenting him to the viewer. The gesture is rendered ambiguous, however, by the saint whom each apostle enfolds in his farther arm: unlabelled, but identifiable by their identical physiognomies as twins, and by the crowns in their hands as martyrs. Thus in the interior logic of the mosaic each apostle presents a saint to Christ. Finally, two figures at either edge of the conch stand by, likewise with gifts in hand. At the viewer's left, an older, bearded man in bishop's pallium holds a church, while at right a third martyr, identified by inscription as the military saint Theodore, holds his crown.

The hierarchy is clear: Christ at center, apostles next, followed by the saintly dedicatees of the church (the martyred twin doctors Cosmas and Damian).

81 Guglielmo Matthiae, *Mosaici medioevali delle chiese di Roma* (Rome: 1967), 135–42. The present figure of Felix is a 17th-century restoration executed on the basis of a drawing of the earlier composition.

Finally, a saint of less immediate significance to the site provides an ambiguous pendant to the founder figure of a church-building bishop. But questions remain. Does the bishop present the church to its dedicatee, the saint beside him, or through him to the central figure of Christ? Is his status equal to that of his symmetrical opposite, the greatly honored Saint Theodore?

The same questions are underlined by the spatial conceit of the composition. All seven persons are roughly equal in height, and the feet of the earth-bound figures cast shadows on the ground. There are two notable divergences from this underlying realism: one involves the nature of Christ, the other the status of the bishop's act. Christ's superterrestrial elevation is partially ameliorated by the shelf of clouds beneath his feet; while the radical reduction in scale of the bishop's gift, the very aisled and apsed container within which the viewer stands, is domesticated through gesture. The bishop, namely, covers his left hand with a corner of his cloak, a familiar late Roman sign of respect adopted by those who exchange gifts with the emperor.⁸²

This seven-figure array is separated from the accompanying inscription by a frieze of thirteen lambs, one of those symbolic compositions (Christ and the apostles?) that the bishops of the Quinisext would demote in favor of more explicit renderings. Here is the text of the inscription as translated by Erik Thunø:

With bright metals, the splendid hall of God shines,
in which the precious light of faith flashes even more radiantly.
From the martyr-physicians unshakeable hope
of being healed has come to the people,
and the place has grown by virtue of [its] sacred honor.
Felix has offered to the Lord this gift,
worthy of a bishop,
that he may live in the highest heights of heaven.⁸³

The mode of address is Liverani's Type A in its impersonal variant: the speaker is exterior to the image, and never invokes the viewer directly. The first two lines place us in territory already familiar from Agathias's epigram on the painting of Kallirhoe, discussed in Part I above. It is a question, namely, of the material affordances of the respective media (mosaic in ss. Cosma e Damiano,

82 Franz Alto Bauer, *Gabe und Person: Geschenke als Träger personaler Aura in der Spätantike* (Eichstatt: 2009), 32–36.

83 Thunø, *Apse Mosaic*, 209.

encaustic in Agathias's poem), and their ability to evoke, albeit imperfectly, specific incorporeal qualities (faith in the mosaic, desire in the painting).⁸⁴

The remainder of the inscription is more complex, setting up two axes with no common term. In the first, Cosmas and Damian provide to the people (*populo* – the closest the inscription comes to invoking its viewer) *spes salutis*, “hope of health.” We are meant to think of two kinds of health, physical and spiritual, an ambivalence underlined by the characterization of the twins as *martyribus medicis* (martyr-physicians). In the second, the bishop offers to the Lord (*Dno*) a tribute or a gift (*munus*) in hopes of exalted salvation (*ut aetheria vivat in arce poli*).

The effect of the inscription is to break open the picture, and that in two ways. First, the viewer, as a member of the “people,” becomes a participant in the exchanges depicted. Second, the strict hierarchy of the symmetrical array (moving from bishop through saint and apostle up to Christ) is circumvented by the assertion of a direct exchange between Felix and the Lord. Pushed to its logical conclusion, the image places the people in the same relation to the bishop as the martyrs bear to Christ.

This is not, in short, an image that resolves into a representation of scripture, or even a theological claim. Instead, it does what images do best: it first marks off the distances between representation and reality, the material and the incorporeal, and then it bridges them. The movement is the same as that of Agathias's archangel epigram, which begins by establishing distance (“Greatly daring was the wax that formed the image of the invisible Prince of the Angels”) and concludes by abolishing it (“Art can convey by colours the prayers of the soul”).⁸⁵ In the apse mosaic, Felix, shown earthbound and at the edge, ends up in “the highest heights of heaven.”

Clearly, this image mediates between its viewers and the holy persons represented: the image and inscription work in concert, first to acknowledge, then to overcome the ontological distinction between human and divine. The apse mosaic of ss Cosma e Damiano, in short, supplies a visual syntax geared to a dual problem: expression of relations between the human and divine, and between the bishop and the people. It does not resolve all questions. Instead, it leaves some answers implicit (how, for example, the bishop relates to the people), and omits others altogether (whether, for example, Felix's wish has been fulfilled). But the syntax – perhaps precisely because it can maintain such useful ambiguities – returns frequently in the art of the following centuries.

84 On mosaic inscriptions that reference their own medium, see Leatherbury, *Inscribing Faith*, 53–56.

85 *Anth. Pal.* 1.34; trans. Paton, *Greek Anthology*, 1, 21–23.

Take, as a slightly later Roman example, the mosaic on the triumphal arch in S. Lorenzo fuori le mura (Figure 2.6).⁸⁶ Here the syntax is identical to ss. Cosma e Damiano: from left to right, we see the bishop (Pelagius II, 579–90), the titular saint (Lawrence), Peter, Christ, Paul, a second early martyr opposite Lawrence (Stephen the Protomartyr), and finally a third saint opposite the bishop (Hippolytus). Yet there are also notable divergences. Christ, although seated on an orb, no longer hovers at the level of the other figures' shoulders. The distinction between the founder-bishop and the holy figures is more pronounced than at ss. Cosma e Damiano: Pelagius is lower than the other six figures on the arch, and he alone lacks a nimbus. Peter and Paul no longer present the martyrs to Christ; instead, Lawrence places his arm around Pelagius.

This latter gesture, in particular, establishes a link to the inscription below: "O deacon, once you endured martyrdom in flames of fire. / Rightly [now] a worshipful light returns to your temples."⁸⁷ The mode of address is Liverani's Type B: an external speaker addresses St. Lawrence. Thus Lawrence serves as the point of entry both for the viewer of the image, who is compelled to address him, and for the bishop, whom he introduces. The social asymmetry of the apse of ss. Cosma e Damiano, in which the bishop and people were placed on separate axes, is partially effaced. Between the apse mosaic of ss. Cosma e Damiano and the arch mosaic of S. Lorenzo, a discourse emerges within which slight modifications gain significance. The innovations of S. Lorenzo are consistent. All serve episcopal humility, representing Pelagius as lesser than the saints and similar to the people.

The discourse also expands to express regional variations. Similar arrays appear in the apses of two basilicas constructed in the north Adriatic in the 6th century, S. Vitale in Ravenna and the Basilica Eufraiana in Poreč. However, in both, the positions either side of Christ are filled by archangels instead of Peter and Paul. The emphasis on the mediating role of the two apostles who were martyred in Rome thus emerges as a peculiarity of that city.

The mosaic at Poreč also expands the number of individuals depicted, with eleven people appearing in nine positions (Figure 2.7). From left to right: the archdeacon Claudius with his diminutive son Eufraius, the bishop Eufraius, St. Maurus, an archangel, Christ in the lap of the Virgin, a second archangel, and three unlabelled saints in a row. The composition is inefficient, tripling the supplementary saints that balance the bishops in the Roman arrays, thus allowing inclusion of the deacon. As Claudius was probably the bishop's brother, the image

86 Matthiae, *Mosaici*, 149–168.

87 Thunø, *Apse Mosaic*, 214.

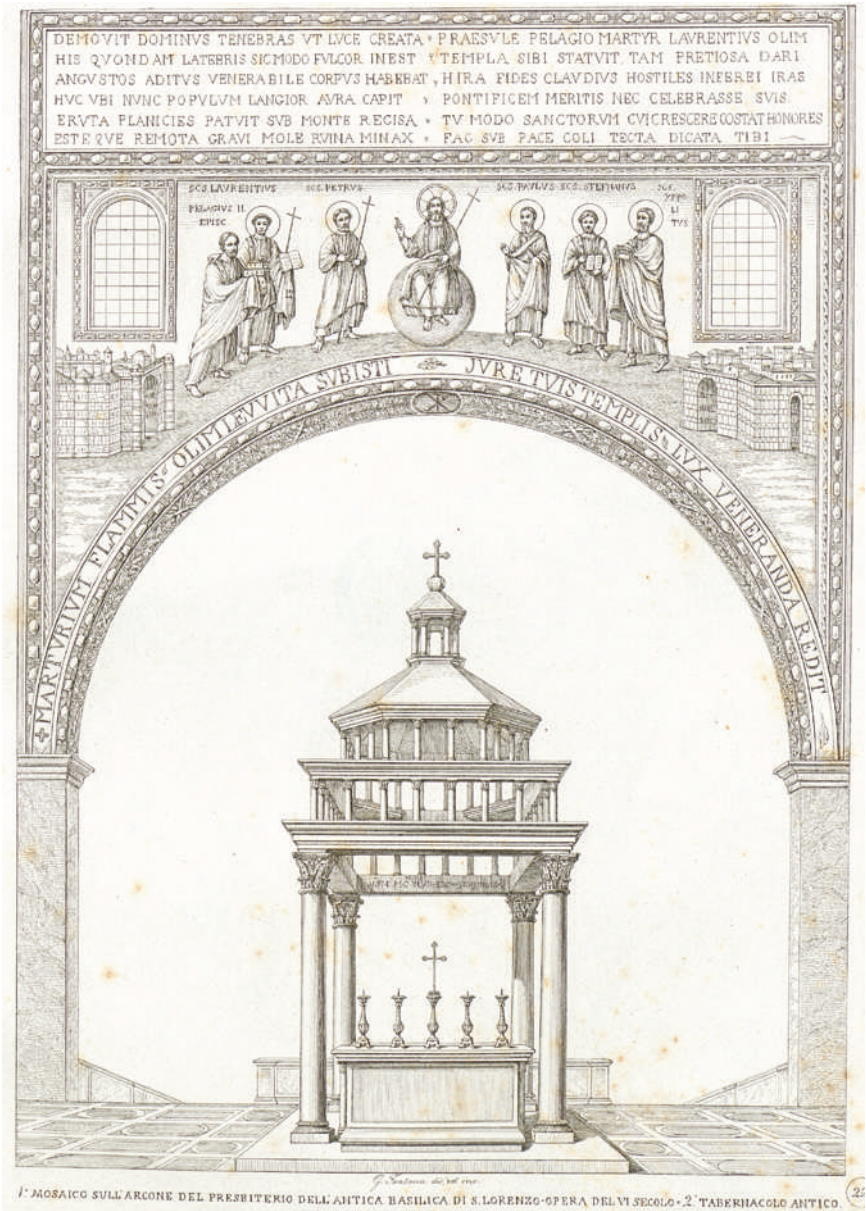


FIGURE 2.6 Triumphal arch, S. Lorenzo fuori le mura, Rome. Giacomo Fontana, *Musaici della primitiva epoca delle chiese di Roma* (Rome: 1870), Tav. XXII

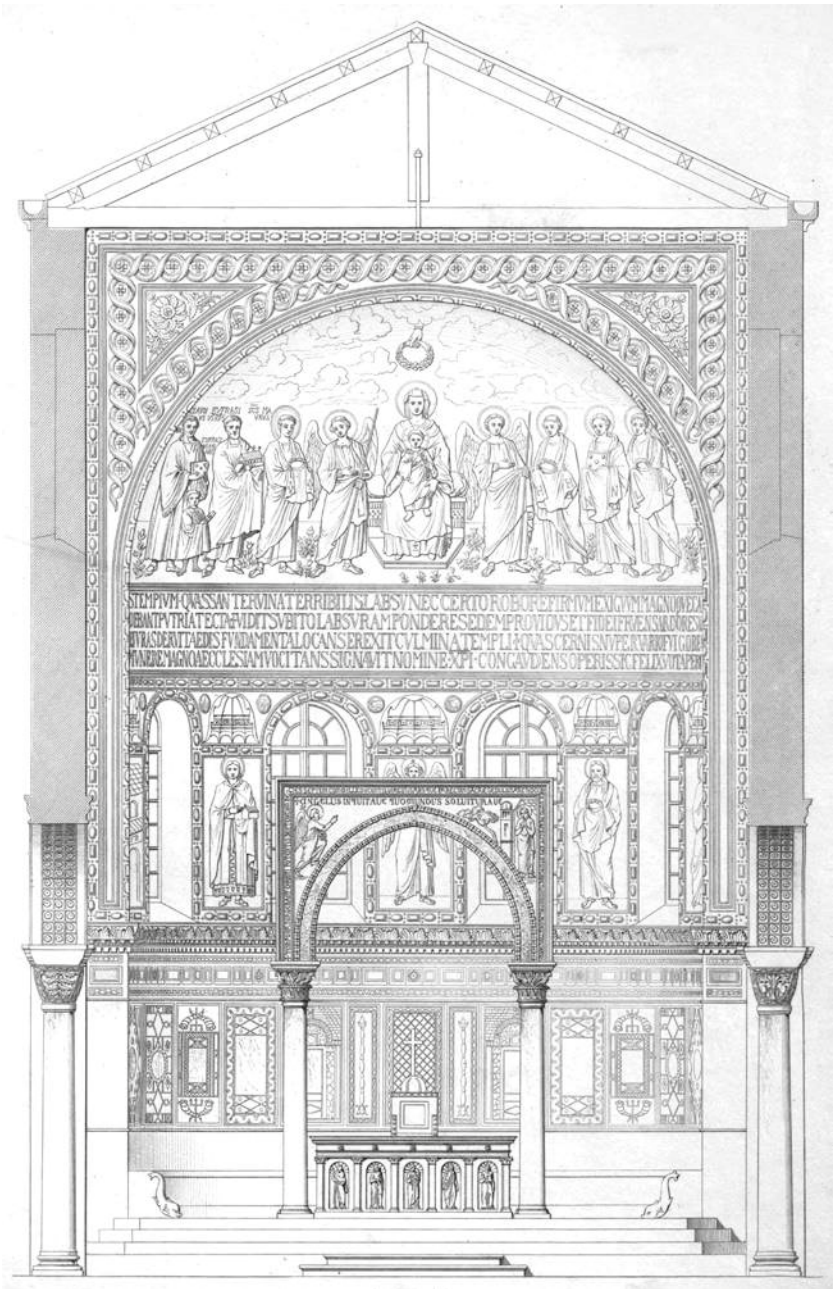


FIGURE 2.7 Apse mosaic, Basilica Eufрасiana, Poreč. L. Lohde, "Der Dom von Parenzo in Istrien," *Zeitschrift für Bauwesen* 9 (1859), Atlas Bl. 16

comes to represent the domination of the episcopal hierarchy by a single family.⁸⁸ An 8th-century fresco behind the altar of the Theodotus Chapel in S. Maria Antiqua adopts a different strategy to include a living person other than a bishop (Figure 2.8). Here the seven-figure array consists of the bishop (Zachary, 741–52), St. Julitta, Paul, the Virgin and Child (“Maria Regina”), Peter, St. Quiricus, and finally the founder Theodotus, who here takes the place of the supplementary saint.

Let us now return to a claim made in the introduction to this essay: the discourse of images is potentially (but not necessarily) autonomous, at the same time that the making of an image is itself a social act. To understand the symmetrical arrays in the churches of Rome and the north Adriatic requires only the most rudimentary knowledge of theology: who Christ is, what a saint is. And yet the pictures are far from rudimentary. The seven- (or five-, or nine-) figure array proved an effective and flexible means to pose and partially answer a variety of questions about the organization of heaven and earth and the boundaries between the two.

The resulting discourse – the interplay between images, through which the signifying potential of the individual image is augmented – is autonomous in the sense that it does not depend on an external text.⁸⁹ At the same time, the facture of one such image produces multiple effects on the social register: large-scale investment of material resources in the case of the mosaics, assertion of prestige on the part of living individuals (which, we can assume, were countered on occasion by accusations of presumption). The facture of many such images forms an ideology: a system “of representation – composed of concepts, ideas, myths, or images – in which men and women ... live ‘their imaginary relations to the real conditions of existence.’”⁹⁰

The nature of the discourse is conditioned in part by the media through which it develops. Monumental images are, in an era before photography, fixed in place and dependent on the movement of potential viewers. A discourse constructed through monumental images is therefore spatially constrained: we would not expect it to maintain its coherence much beyond the

88 Charles Pietri and Luce Pietri, eds., *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313–604)* 1 (Rome: 1999), 449. Not only does the deacon's son bear the bishop's unusual name, the mosaicists employed the same facial type for all three: Ann Terry and Henry Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor: The Wall Mosaics in the Cathedral of Eufrasius at Poreč* (University Park: 2007), 94.

89 This is not to deny that other aspects of specific images might emerge through knowledge of an external text, as for example the apse of ss. Cosma e Damiano and Isaiah 2:2–4. Armin Bergmeier, “The *Traditio Legis* in Late Antiquity and its Afterlives in the Middle Ages,” *Gesta* 56 (2017), 27–52.

90 Hall, *Cultural Studies*, 135–136; paraphrasing Althusser, *For Marx*, 231–236.



FIGURE 2.8 Theodotus chapel, S. Maria Antiqua, Rome. Joseph Wilpert, *Die römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom VI. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1916), Taf. 179

region adumbrated by Rome – Ravenna – Poreč. Indeed, as soon as we cross the Adriatic and travel the Via Egnatia to Thessaloniki, we encounter something similar in purpose but distinct in execution.

The Basilica of Hagios Demetrios, situated just north of Thessaloniki's agora, supplies evidence for two distinct campaigns of mosaic decoration in the 6th and 7th centuries. The first, above the arcade of the basilica's north aisle, was mostly destroyed in a fire of 1917. Its former extent is witnessed now by one set of photographs and one set of watercolors, both executed in the early 20th century (Figure 2.9). The mosaics of the second campaign are still preserved on two piers in the transept (Figure 2.10). Neither campaign can be

dated precisely, but the first is usually placed in the first half of the 6th century, the second in the first third of the 7th century.⁹¹

The mosaics of the north aisle comprise a series of votive images, of which some were dedicated by anonymous individuals (the inscription “as a prayer for one whose name God knows” appears twice) and four were given in thanks for the birth and/or health of a single girl who is depicted in all (“and you, my Lord Saint Demetrios, aid us your servants and your servant Maria, whom you gave to us”).⁹² The compositions are heterogeneous but may be roughly divided into three types. In the first, represented by three examples, the orant saint is flanked by tiny donor figures; the composition finds a close parallel on a marble stele representing St. Menas.⁹³ The second type is represented by two scenes: the Virgin appears at center, once with Christ (Figure 2.9, at left), once without. In both she is flanked by angels, who introduce the donors either directly or via the offices of St. Demetrios; the composition finds a close parallel in a panel from Sinai.⁹⁴ The two types together establish a hierarchy identical to that of the Italian arrays. One may approach a saint directly, but the Virgin and Christ require an introduction, be it saintly or angelic.⁹⁵ The third, most mysterious, type is represented by two outdoor scenes: here again the donors interact directly with the saint (Figure 2.9, at right).

To recognize in these images votives dedicated by specific members of the community does not preclude their appeal to other viewers as well. Franz Alto Bauer observes: “Since the saint consistently presents himself frontally to the viewer, it is not only the person represented in the image who enjoys his intervention, but also the people outside of the image, that is, the visitors to the church.”⁹⁶ So too for the preserved pier mosaics of the later campaign, whose

91 Bauer, *Eine Stadt*, 185–215.

92 Translations after Robin Cormack, “The Mosaic Decoration of St. Demetrios, Thessalonica: A Reexamination in the Light of the Drawings of W. S. George,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 64 (1969), 17–52.

93 André Grabar, “Notes sur les mosaïques de Saint-Démétrios à Salonique,” *Byzantion* 48 (1978), 64–77, here at 74.

94 For the icon, see the catalog entry by Robin Cormack in Maria Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan: 2000), 262–63.

95 For a more nuanced account of the varieties of intercession depicted in these mosaics, see Charles Barber, “Early Representations of the Mother of God,” in Maria Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milan: 2000), 253–261, here at 255.

96 Bauer, *Eine Stadt*, 194: “Dadurch dass sich der Heilige dem Betrachter stets frontal präsentiert, gelangen nicht nur die im Bild dargestellten Personen in den Genuss der Fürsprache, sondern auch jene Personen, die sich außerhalb des Bilds befinden, also die damaligen Besucher der Kirche.”



FIGURE 2.9 Mosaics of the north aisle, Hagios Demetrios, Thessaloniki (destroyed)
 WATERCOLOR BY W.S. GEORGE (1909), REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF
 THE BRITISH SCHOOL AT ATHENS

monumental figures are executed just above the heads of those standing on the church floor. As Kitzinger noted, this proximity was itself an innovation: these mosaics “were allowed to invade the zone beneath the principal cornice, traditionally the dividing line between imagery and paneling or dado.”⁹⁷

The compositions of the pier mosaics range from single standing figures (St. Sergios alone, St. George sheltering two diminutive children) through pairs (St. Theodore and the Virgin, accompanied by a tiny Christ reaching down from heaven; Demetrios with a deacon), a trio (Demetrios flanked by a cleric and a civic official, Figure 2.10), and a badly damaged group of five (Demetrios flanked by four clerics). The diversity of compositions is matched by a diversity of inscriptions. Perhaps these mosaics were also conceived as votives, but their inscriptions explicitly engage a more general audience: either addressing the viewer directly (the personal variant of Liverani’s Type A, as in Figure 2.10, “you see the donors of the famed house, right and left of the martyr Demetrios ...”), or prompting the viewer to address the saint (Type B, “Holy martyr of Christ, friend of the city, bear the care of both citizens and strangers”).⁹⁸ This last text renders explicit the breadth of the image’s intended audience: it is a medium through which both natives of the city and visitors from abroad are meant to address the local saint.

The Thessalonikan mosaics are marked off from the Italian arrays by the greater variety both of their composition and of the living figures whom they represent. No social rank acquires the same prominence in Hagios Demetrios as that of the bishop in Rome, even if, as Brubaker notes, the earlier mosaics in

97 Kitzinger, “Byzantine Art,” 41.

98 The texts of the inscriptions are given by Bauer, *Eine Stadt*, 230, nn. 42 and 44.



FIGURE 2.10 Mosaic of the southwestern transept pier, north side, Hagios Demetrios, Thessaloniki

PHOTOGRAPH BY W.S. GEORGE (1907), REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF THE BRITISH SCHOOL AT ATHENS

Thessaloniki are marked by an emphasis on family relations, the later on “the official hierarchies of the church and state.”⁹⁹ By contrast, the divine hierarchy,

99 Leslie Brubaker, “Elites and Patronage in Early Byzantium: The Evidence from Hagios Demetrios at Thessalonike,” in John Haldon and Lawrence I. Conrad (eds.), *Elites Old and*

according to which humans may approach Christ and the Virgin only through the mediation of saints or angels, is maintained consistently in Rome, the north Adriatic, and Thessaloniki. In all three regions, finally, the image is the primary means through which that hierarchy is expressed, the inscription by contrast a means through which any viewer may find a place within it.

In short, the images in the churches of Rome, the north Adriatic, and Thessaloniki are compositionally distinct but functionally similar. It would be possible to consider further regionally delimited practices of the 6th and 7th centuries by reference to preserved monuments: most notably those in Egyptian monasteries, whose images were closely associated with practices of spiritual discipline and prayer.¹⁰⁰ Frustratingly, we cannot do the same for Constantinople. Kitzinger still sought in the monuments of Rome in particular reflections of Constantinopolitan style, and perhaps also of practice.¹⁰¹ And yet he simultaneously drew attention to the peculiar reserve of the monuments preserved in the capital, writing of “the vogue of entirely uniconic decorations which the interior of Justinian’s St. Sophia so conspicuously exemplified” and “the apparently total lack of evidence, either literary or monumental, that during the subsequent reigns [after Tiberius II, 574–582] down to the period of Iconoclasm any religious building in Constantinople was provided with a major pictorial decoration involving a coherent iconographic scheme.”¹⁰²

There is indeed no material evidence for a composition in Constantinople parallel to those found in Rome, the north Adriatic, and Thessaloniki. The most suggestive evidence is textual instead and concerns the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary at Blachernae, just outside the land walls and along the Golden Horn. A text possibly dating to the 6th century contains descriptions of two images installed within the original structure (the so-called *Soros*), which housed the relic of the Virgin’s *maphorion* (robe).¹⁰³ Scholars have wanted to situate one or both of these images in the apse of the building, whose physical traces are long since destroyed; the texts neither specify nor exclude this location.¹⁰⁴

New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, (The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East) 6 (Princeton: 2004), 63–90; quote at 90.

100 Elizabeth Bolman, “Depicting the Kingdom of Heaven: Paintings and Monastic Practice in Early Byzantine Egypt,” in Roger Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700* (Cambridge: 2007), 408–433.

101 Kitzinger, “Byzantine Art,” e.g. at 11 for style, 42 for practice.

102 Kitzinger, “Byzantine Art,” 43–44.

103 Text with French translation: Antoine Wegner, *L’assomption de la T. S. Vierge dans la tradition byzantine du VI^e au Xe siècle: Études et documents* (Paris: 1955), 294–303.

104 Analysis of the sources by Cyril Mango, “The Origins of the Blachernae Shrine at Constantinople,” in Nenad Cambi and Emilio Marin (eds.), *Acta XIII Congressus Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae Pars II* (Vatican City: 1998), 61–76; 70 with

One image depicted the imperial family: “the Virgin Mary seated on a throne, flanked by the emperor Leo [457–474], his wife Veronica (i.e., Verina) and their daughter Ariadne. Verina was shown falling down (προσπίπτουσα) before Mary, while holding (βαστάζουσα) her son.”¹⁰⁵ If the image was executed while these figures were still living, then it would be the earliest such scene we have considered. More significantly, it would also represent a different etiquette from that observed further west, according to which living individuals, albeit of imperial rank, may directly approach the Virgin without angels or saints as intermediaries.

The second image is of a type now familiar: “the holy Virgin flanked by two angels and two saints, namely John the Baptist and Conon. The patricians Galbuis and Candidus were also shown in an attitude of prayer.”¹⁰⁶ Identification of the two “patricians” presents considerable difficulties;¹⁰⁷ but in general, if the texts are to be trusted, the Blachernae adopted visual strategies familiar both from Italy and from Thessaloniki to address a distinct set of problems, namely, the distinctions in status between non-clerical individuals.

The iconophile *Life of St. Stephen the Younger* refers to further images in the Blachernae sanctuary: a cycle representing the life of Christ said to have been removed during the reign of Constantine v.¹⁰⁸ Allowing for the polemical intent of the text, the account is plausible enough, as the iconoclast council of 754 was hosted in this very church. But another account regarding Constantine’s iconoclast measures may be still more telling. According to a 9th-century miracle story, the apse of the church of the Chalkoprateia, a major Marian dedication near Constantinople’s monumental core, was decorated in the 6th century with an image of the annunciation. The Virgin held Christ in her arms, even as the archangel, likewise depicted, foretold to her Christ’s birth.¹⁰⁹

n. 41 for a placement of the image of the imperial family in the apse. Matthews, *Dawn of Christian Art*, 54, writes of “two apse images,” placing the image with Galbuis and Candidus “in the apse of the basilica,” a 6th-century construction.

105 Paraphrase by Mango, “Origins,” 70; for the text see Wenger, *Assomption*, 300–302.

106 Paraphrase by Mango, “Origins,” 71; for the text see Wenger, *Assomption*, 302.

107 Mango, “Origins,” 71–72.

108 Marie-France Auzépy (ed. and trans.), *La Vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 3 (Aldershot: 1997), 126 and 221. On the polemical context of this chapter, see Marie-France Auzépy, *L’Hagiographie et l’Iconoclisme Byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d’Étienne le Jeune* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 5 (Aldershot: 1999), 243–248.

109 Wolfgang Lackner, “Ein byzantinisches Marienmirakel,” *Byzantina* 13 (1985), 835–860, text at 851.

If this is correct, then the apse mosaic of the Chalkoprateia pursued quite a different logic from those of the churches in Rome, the north Adriatic, and Thessaloniki. Rather than marking off the social relations between individuals resident in the divine and the human realms, it was concerned instead with the dual nature of Christ. As Cyril Mango has noted, the image described drew a distinction between Christ's divine, "pre-eternal" nature, and the human nature that was fashioned at the time of the annunciation. Notably, a similar Christological interest was expressed by the apse mosaic of a monument within Constantinople's regional ambit: the Church of the Koimesis in the Monastery of Hyakinthos, Nicaea (Figure 2.11).¹¹⁰

The church was destroyed in the 1920s in the course of the Greco-Turkish War, but not before a substantial campaign of documentation was carried out by Theodor Schmit.¹¹¹ The standard account of the apse decoration was essayed by Paul Underwood on the basis of Schmit's photographs. Beneath the post-iconoclastic Virgin and Child (Phase III), the seams around an earlier representation of the cross are clearly visible (Phase II), and Underwood thought he could discern an additional set of seams testifying to an original Phase I in which, he deduced, the Virgin and Child were depicted on a footstool.¹¹²

It is impossible to establish with certainty the iconography of the original phase, which must have been contemporary with the construction of the church ca. 700.¹¹³ As Mango writes, "we are not ... entitled to assume that the iconography of Phase I was *in all respects* identical to that of Phase III." Only the inscriptions, which were not touched by the subsequent alterations, provide a sure guide to the original program.¹¹⁴ The three key texts are scriptural – Ps. 109:3, Eph. 1:21, and Hebr. 1:6 – of which the first was understood by the exegetes to refer to Christ's pre-eternal origins, the latter two to the human

110 Cyril Mango, "The Chalkoprateia Annunciation and the Pre-Eternal Logos," *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 17 (1993–94), 165–170.

111 Theodor Schmit, *Die Koimesis-Kirche von Nikaia: Das Bauwerk und die Mosaiken* (Berlin: 1927).

112 Paul A. Underwood, "The Evidence of Restorations in the Sanctuary Mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea," *DOP* 13 (1959), 235–243. For criticism of Underwood's Phase I, see Marie-France Auzépy, "Liturgie et art sous les Isauriens: à propos de la Dormition de Nicée," in Olivier Delouis, Sophie Métivier, and Paule Pagès (eds.), *Le saint, le moine, et le paysan* (Byzantina Sorbonensia) 29 (Paris: 2016), 29–58.

113 For the date ca. 700, see Robert Ousterhout, *Eastern Medieval Architecture* (Oxford: 2019), 254–55. Auzépy, "Liturgie," argues for a date in the reign of Constantine v.

114 Mango, "Chalkoprateia Annunciation," 168.



FIGURE 2.11 Apse mosaic, Church of the Koimesis, Monastery of Hyakinthos, Nicaea (destroyed). Theodor Schmit, *Die Koimesis-Kirche von Nikaia: Das Bauwerk und die Mosaiken* (Berlin: 1927)

Christ. Thus, for Mango, “the basic meaning of the Nicaea programme may be understood as the identity of the pre-eternal Logos and the human Christ.”¹¹⁵

The description of the Chalkoprateia apse and the preserved inscriptions of the Nicaea apse suggest a regional tendency in the decoration of churches in and around Constantinople. In contrast to the monumental images displayed in the churches of Rome, the north Adriatic, and Thessaloniki, which sought to chart the relations between earthly and divine hierarchies and the etiquette that regulated their mutual contact, the monumental images displayed in the churches of Constantinople and Nicaea sought to express the nature of Christ instead. Unlike the canons of the Quinisext, they did so in terms that directly engage the Christological controversies of the 6th and 7th centuries. For Mango, namely, the Chalkoprateia apse may be considered “anti-Monophysite” in its “stress on the distinctness of the natures” of Christ; while the Nicaea program becomes legible in the context of the Monothelete controversy – even if the loss of the original composition makes it impossible to tell which side it took.¹¹⁶

3 Art and the Origins of Iconoclasm

In the foregoing, I have sought to present the role of religious images in early Byzantine thought and practice in a distinct fashion from that adopted by previous scholarship. To begin, I have shifted attention away from the contested narrative source texts (hagiographical, historiographical, etc.), and towards two uncontested textual sources: the episcopal pronouncements on images at the Quinisext, and the many preserved epigrams on images. On the basis of these two corpora, I have proposed the existence of a discourse of images that was semi-autonomous from theological discourse and directed toward distinct purposes.

I have continued, then, by establishing the nature of those distinct purposes through analysis of the monumental decoration of churches in Rome, the north Adriatic, and Thessaloniki. These images did not seek to express theological doctrine. Instead, they served as media for the expression and establishment of social relationships and relations between the human and the divine. Only in Constantinople and Nicaea do we have evidence for images

¹¹⁵ Mango, “Chalkoprateia Annunciation,” 168–170. A more elaborate Christological reading of the apse mosaic is presented by Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 63–69, who at points does assume the identity of Phase I and Phase III. Auzépy, “Liturgie,” argues that Underwood’s Phase II was the original decoration, and provides a detailed analysis of its Christological argument.

¹¹⁶ Mango, “Chalkoprateia Annunciation,” 168–170.

that directly addressed a major point of contention in the later iconoclastic controversies, namely, the nature of Christ.

By way of conclusion, then, let us now address explicitly the relationship between the art of the 6th and 7th centuries and the iconoclastic controversies of the 8th and 9th. For Kitzynger, as we have seen, the period between ca. 550 and the early 8th century was marked by “a tremendous increase and intensification of the cult of images.”¹¹⁷ His explanation of this phenomenon was rooted in the assumption that practice (sometimes explicitly qualified as “popular”) encouraged the increasing use of images in worship, but could be opposed by “counterpressure from above.”¹¹⁸ In the 6th and 7th centuries, multiple factors (the struggle against heresy, the veneration of the imperial image) served to reduce this counterpressure, while imperial iconoclasm represented its reassertion. Kitzynger’s account, in other words, relies on an opposition between popular and elite opinion: the former is credulous in the face of images; while the latter is on occasion willing to exploit this credulity, on occasion concerned rather to stamp it out. Explanation of change is thereby displaced onto the shifting opinions of elites regarding the best management of popular opinion.

This account aligns well with 9th-century representations of the iconoclastic controversy. Consider the letter addressed by the Byzantine emperors Michael II (820–829) and Theophilos (822–842) to the Frankish emperor Louis (“the Pious,” 814–840) in the year 824: the Byzantine emperors “caused images to be removed from the lower positions, and permitted those which had been placed in higher positions to remain in their places, so that the pictures themselves might be considered like writings, but not be adored by the simple and the weak (*ne ab indoctoribus et infirmioribus adorarentur*), and they forbade that lamps be lit or incense offered before them.”¹¹⁹ But Kitzynger’s account cannot explain why the emperors might have chosen to abandon their earlier policy of humoring images and adopt a new policy of policing them at a particular time – unless we are to imagine a sort of maximum threshold above which popular investment in the cult of images became self-evidently intolerable.

Brubaker and Haldon, by contrast, situate the “tipping point” in the function of images ca. 680, and consider it as “a product of late-seventh-century insecurities”: “the state, the church, and the individual orthodox believer – all in a state of spiritual crisis – needed help, in the form of new channels of access

¹¹⁷ Kitzynger, “Cult of Images,” 115.

¹¹⁸ Kitzynger, “Cult of Images,” 120.

¹¹⁹ Albert Werminghoff (ed.), *Concilia Aevi Karolini 2 MGH, Concilia 2* (Hanover: 1908), 478–479. Anderson, “Images Down Low.”

to divinity.”¹²⁰ At the same time, “an opposition to icons ... derived essentially from the same need for purification in the face of catastrophe that the veneration of sacred portraits developed from.”¹²¹ This account, in other words, attributes an increase in the power of images to a psychological state (“insecurity,” “spiritual crisis”) experienced by individuals, political, and religious institutions alike; and the later opposition to images to the same impulse.

This account too finds support in the sources of the period. A quick search reveals numerous chronicles that speak of a great fear (μέγας φόβος) falling upon the people. But the phenomenon is hardly limited to the 7th century and can indeed have a positive spiritual connotation (something like the German *Ehrfurcht*).¹²² In other words, Brubaker and Haldon’s etiology, much like Kitzinger’s, gives primary efficacy to a condition that obtained at many places and times in late Roman and Byzantine history. It cannot explain, for example, why the power of images did not increase in the early 7th century, in response to the anxieties and insecurities provoked by the Roman-Persian war; and why it did not then provoke an imperial desire for purification through “iconoclasm” already ca. 650.

In this essay, I have sought to provide the basis for a different understanding of the relationship between the art of the 6th and 7th centuries, on the one hand, and the iconoclast controversies of the 8th and 9th centuries, on the other. This understanding begins by rejecting a perspective shared both by Kitzinger and by Brubaker and Haldon. All understand the “power of images” as a quantifiable property subject to fluctuation across time and throughout a given society as a whole. For all, imperial iconoclasm responded to a marked increase in that property, whether that occurred steadily over the course of the 6th or 7th centuries, or suddenly at the end of the 7th.

I do not believe that it is possible to meaningfully represent the relation between images and society in such a unified fashion, as if it were the GDP of an industrial nation. On the one hand, the “power of images” – or, more concretely, the possibility that an image might mediate between the person who views it and the being whom it represents – was deeply embedded within Greco-Roman culture and attested throughout the 6th and 7th centuries. It is expressed through a series of literary conceits that were applied both to “secular” art (images of courtesans and charioteers) and to “sacred” art (images of Christ, the Virgin, the angels, and the saints). And it is also worked through,

120 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 782.

121 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 787.

122 For discussion of the phrase in its epigraphic and literary contexts, see Anna Sitz, “‘Great Fear’: Epigraphy and Orality in a Byzantine Apse in Cappadocia,” *Gesta* 56 (2017), 5–26.

so to speak, “in the paint” (or, and with different entailments, in the mosaic), in those images that not only depict human and divine figures interacting in a common space and time, but also situate their viewers within those hierarchies and exchanges. On the other hand, the literary discourse also explores the *limitations* of images – in particular, their insufficiency to the depiction of those incorporeal qualities that were acknowledged in, but not limited to, divine beings.

Instead of considering the “power of images” as a quantifiable attribute of a given state or society, we might speak instead of a “discourse of images” which is content to harbor contradictions and may even openly delight in paradox. In the 6th and 7th centuries, the bishops were familiar with this discourse; indeed, they participated in it whenever they commissioned an ambitious work of art. One of its functions was indeed to express the relationships between bishops and their congregations on the one hand, bishops and the heavenly beings on the other. It was also a regionally differentiated discourse – its component monuments in Rome, Thessaloniki, and Constantinople are visually distinct and even betray divergent etiquettes. And it is a discourse that found no expression in the official conciliar pronouncements of the 6th and 7th centuries, not even in the canons of the Quinisext. Indeed, the latter seem to acknowledge its relative autonomy, explicitly treating art as a lay concern.

In the city of Rome, the discourse of images preserved its relative autonomy for centuries: the visual strategies that were first developed in the 6th century to chart the interrelated divine and human hierarchies were maintained into the 13th.¹²³ Precisely for this reason, it is not possible to consider the relationship between art and Byzantine iconoclasm without directly engaging Roman monuments. Rome provides the counterexample of a political sphere no less subject to insecurity or spiritual crisis, but within which the status of the image did not become a topic of intensive theological controversy.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, we may propose two axes along which Rome and Constantinople differ. The first relates to images, the second to the distribution of financial resources and social capital. First: the appearance of monumental apse images that invoke theological distinctions regarding the natures of Christ appears unique to Constantinople and western Asia Minor. The apse of the Church of the Koimesis in Nicaea, in particular, provides a roughly datable monument in which the discourse of images was “articulated”¹²⁴ to the discourse of theology. These two discourses, notionally

¹²³ Kinney, “Communication.”

¹²⁴ “By ‘articulation,’ I mean the form of a connection or link that can make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary,

autonomous, could have been linked to each other at any time, but as far as we can tell, this only happened in Constantinople and its vicinity in the 6th and 7th centuries.

The question then becomes, why there and why then; and this is where a second, social, distinction between Rome and Constantinople becomes useful. In Italy, by the 6th century, the traditional markers of Roman senatorial status had all but disappeared; “no senatorial families can be traced past the early seventh century.”¹²⁵ Instead, military and episcopal office became the primary markers of elite status. I have already mentioned above Brubaker’s analysis of the same process as manifested in the mosaics of Hagios Demetrios in Thessaloniki – a shift in emphasis from family to office.¹²⁶

Constantinople was subject to similar developments, but they took hold later and less decisively. Granted, here too, no individual family can be traced past the early 7th century. Nevertheless, senatorial titles were still expressed on seals into the 8th, and “the concept of privileged birth” is still expressed in sources of the 7th and 8th centuries.¹²⁷ One of the primary means through which family identity and wealth could be secured was the establishment of monasteries. The best-attested example is the family of Theodore the Studite, whose uncle and father held high ranks in the financial bureaucracy and co-founded the monastery of Sakkoudion on family lands in Bithynia in the 780s.¹²⁸ Theodore claims that his grandparents, too, were well-born.¹²⁹

Therefore, in Constantinople and its hinterland, monumental patronage persisted outside of the direct purview of either emperor or bishops, and its primary form was the construction of monasteries. Hyakinthos, abbot and patron ca. 700 of the monastery that still bore his name centuries later, must be considered within this same context. And it is significant that the dedicatory

determined, absolute, and essential for all times; it is not necessarily given in all cases as a law or a fact of life. It requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, and so one has to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made.” Hall, *Cultural Studies*, 121.

125 Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford: 2005), 207.

126 Brubaker, “Elites.”

127 Briefly, Wickham, *Framing*, 236, whence the quote. In detail, John Haldon, “The Fate of the Late Roman Senatorial Elite: Extinction or Transformation,” in John Haldon and Lawrence I. Conrad (eds.), *Elites Old and New in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, (The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East) 6 (Princeton: 2004), 179–234.

128 Thomas Pratsch, *Theodoros Studies (759–826): Zwischen Dogma und Pragma* (Frankfurt: 1998), 62–63 and 71–76.

129 In his funeral address on his uncle Plato: Πατέρες μὲν τῷ μακαρίῳ Πλάτῳ, Σέργιος καὶ Εὐφημία, ὧν τὸ εὐγενὲς ἐπίσημον, καὶ ὁ τρόπος οὐκ ἀγενέστερος. PG 99: 803–50, 806A.

epigram of the church of the Koimesis was composed in metrical verse.¹³⁰ Depending on how one judges its merits, it may constitute a rare exception to the rule that “between c. 640 and 790 the literary genre of the epigram ceases to exist altogether.”¹³¹

In summary: an analysis of the discourse of images in the 6th and 7th centuries allows us to identify two closely related phenomena that are chronologically and geographically restricted in scope (unlike the “insecurity” invoked by Brubaker and Haldon). They are, moreover, close both in space and in time to the west-Anatolian bishops whose complaints inaugurated the iconoclast controversy in the early 8th century.¹³²

1. Expression of Christological doctrine in monumental images at the front of the church; and,
2. Construction of monasteries as a form of monumental patronage not directly controlled by church or state.

These may be considered as two conditions of possibility, neither of which is sufficient or decisive, but whose conjunction renders possible a cultural transformation such as the introduction of imperial iconoclasm. As Hall writes:

A cultural transformation ... is not something totally new. It is not something which has a straight, unbroken line of continuity from the past. It is transformation through a reorganisation of the elements of a cultural practice, elements which do not in themselves have any necessary political connotations. It is not the individual elements of a discourse that have political or ideological connotations; it is the way those elements are organised together in a new discursive formation.¹³³

A more differentiated view of the role of images in the centuries before Byzantine iconoclasm helps us to understand that latter development as the result of a specific and local reorganization of the elements of a cultural practice, not as the inevitable outcome of a generalized socio-cultural trend.

130 Cyril Mango, “Notes d’épigraphie et d’archéologie: Constantinople, Nicée,” *TM* 12 (1994), 349–57.

131 Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry*, 133.

132 For the letters, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 94–105.

133 Hall, *Cultural Studies*, 144–145.

PART 2

The Sources



Chronicles, Histories, and Letters

Jesse W. Torgerson and Mike Humphreys

What are the surviving historical and epistolary sources for Byzantine iconoclasm, and what are the problems with them? Cyril Mango's cautionary statement has aged well:

the historian of Iconoclasm, like any other historian, has to work within the limits of his source of material. ... we must, therefore, reconcile ourselves to the fact that this material is and will remain pretty scrappy, and that the inferences that may legitimately be drawn from it are necessarily limited.¹

More recent scholarship has gone further, emphasizing our sources' constructed nature and often highly polemical stance towards the iconoclasts.² While endorsing that approach, this chapter will argue there is still a great deal left to discover by working with the materials that survive. There is need for creative re-reading, and even expansion of the apparent limits on "inferences that may legitimately be drawn." But to honestly answer the initial question we must first be honest about where "the problems" come from. Many of our problems arise because we would like the sources to do something that they do not do, or only do problematically. That is, in the present case we would like the sources to tell us *about iconoclasm*. What actually happened, when, where, why, by whom, and to whom? But this is not really what these sources set out to do. How, then, should a scholar make responsible arguments about the history of the iconoclast controversy from such sources as still survive?

1 Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm*, ed. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: 1977), 1–6, 6.

2 This is a recurring theme of Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period (ca. 680–850): The Sources* (Aldershot: 2001), and *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History* (Cambridge: 2011). These in turn are highly influenced by the copious works of Marie-France Auzépy—see, inter alia, *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris: 2007)—and especially Paul Speck; see, inter alia, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus* (Bonn: 1990). For a more traditionally empiricist account of the relevant historical texts see Warren Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: 2013).

Furthermore, beyond the particular ideological problems of our sources for Byzantine iconoclasm, there are the problems common to reading *all* ancient things. When we encounter a source in a critical edition or modern translation we tend to see this as *the* text, the unfiltered work of a particular author at a particular time. What we actually possess, and what the Byzantines really read, were manuscripts, material realia that were copied and recopied over centuries. In each manuscript the “text” is different, both in content and the context of what else was in that manuscript. Ideally, every text should be read through the lens of each of its manuscripts.³

Moreover, every text is written within and shaped by a genre. By genre we refer to shared “markers” which can “distinguish one type of communication from another.”⁴ Genre is an indelibly social act of communication that occurs when a reader encounters a text in time and space as a historical-material phenomenon.⁵ Genre, thus, involves historical description of the way categories of texts operated and were perceived in their world. How a text was written and read differed depending on whether it presents itself as a chronicle, history, or letter. Texts are also fundamentally shaped by their mode of transmission. For instance, how one reads a letter is shaped by whether it survives on its own, as part of a collection, or embedded in another sort of text.

Given the constraints of space, this chapter cannot provide detailed commentary for every chronicle, history, and letter produced in the period. Rather, we shall set out the overall problems of each genre, and then describe and comment upon those texts that have been fundamental to scholarship on Byzantine iconoclasm. However, each section shall conclude with a more in-depth examination of a particular text or moment from a text, offering a reading that demonstrates the problems of interpretation that face a scholar of the subject, and how careful attention to the material reality and generic context can help.

1 Chronicles and Chronographies

It is not news to note that historical sources from our period are primarily chronicles and chronographies, which organize their historical material under

3 For an excellent example of this approach, see Stratis Papaioannou, “Byzantine *Historia*,” in Kurt Raaflaub (ed.), *Thinking, Recording, and Writing History in the Ancient World*, (Chichester: 2014), 297–313, 303–6.

4 Ralph Cohen and John Rowlett, *Genre Theory and Historical Change* (Charlottesville: 2017), 86.

5 John Frow, *Genre* (London: 2006).

year-by-year headings. However, it is a new claim to state that the dominance of this genre matters for how we read our sources: Byzantinists largely acknowledge the above point only to make little of it.⁶ Such nonchalance is worrisome. It very nearly implies the Byzantines were not fully self-aware, using the title “chronicle” when they meant “history.”⁷ Alternatively, our discussion begins with the assumption that the Byzantines were fully aware of the nature and implications of *historia*, and chose instead to write and work primarily within the generic landscape of *chronikon*.⁸ What should we make of this choice?

First, chronography or chronicle-writing is not a uniquely medieval genre but a continuous practice from antiquity.⁹ When authors of the 8th and 9th centuries entitled a chronicle, they were situating that work within centuries of incremental generic development.¹⁰ Second, chronography did not only dominate historical writing in Greek during this period, but also historical writing in Arabic and Latin. Acknowledging this shared phenomenon allows us to pursue important comparative questions and contextualize our readings.¹¹

Third, we should approach these sources with caution. Chronicles—however we might want to define them—were ubiquitous in 8th- and 9th-century Byzantium but are all but absent from 21st-century historical

6 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 165–67, asserts that whether a work is entitled “chronicle” or “history” matters little to how we actually *read* texts: “... the distinction between ‘history’ and ‘chronicle,’ or, more exactly between ‘annals’ and ‘chronicles’ ... is of little value except in the crudest terms.”

7 Ann Christys has similarly argued for retaining indigenous nomenclature in her analysis of Arabic texts, for otherwise we find ourselves inventing “a category that their authors would not have recognized, for even the designation ‘history’ (*taʾriḫ*) is anachronistic.” Ann Christys, “Universal Chronicles in Arabic before c. 900,” *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015), 61–70.

8 For the importance of genre in shaping how medieval scholars wrote and interpreted different forms of history, see Justin Lake, “Current Approaches to Medieval Historiography,” *History Compass* 13 (2015), 89–109.

9 Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski have argued that examples of a consistent chronicle genre persist from Babylonian tablets to our 9th-century Byzantine chronicles: Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time: The Latin Chronicle Tradition from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD: Volume I. A Historical Introduction to the Chronicle Genre from Its Origins to the High Middle Ages* (Turnhout: 2013).

10 For discussion on whether medieval chronicles should be read in comparison to a static generic definition, or as the latest instantiation of a continually modified one, see Torgerson’s review article on Burgess and Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time*, and the authors’ response: Jesse Torgerson, “Could Isidore’s Chronicle Have Delighted Cicero? Using the Concept of Genre to Compare Ancient and Medieval Chronicles,” *Medieval Worlds* 3 (2016), 65–82; and Richard Burgess and Michael Kulikowski, “Could Isidore’s Chronicle Have Delighted Cicero? A Response,” *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017), 46–53.

11 Maria Mavroudi and Simon Franklin, “Byzantino-Slavica and Byzantino-Arabica: Possibilities and Problems of Comparison,” *Byzantinoslavica* 65 (2007), 51–67.

literature.¹² Since we so rarely produce texts in this genre, we cannot claim to possess an intuitive sense of what the Byzantines meant chronicles to do. As Ian Wood recently summarized concerning study of early medieval Latin chronicles, when scholars read these texts too much from the lens of “history,” we miss the centrality of the very concept of time itself to what these works sought to communicate.¹³ When we read a medieval chronicle we tend to see it as encyclopaedic in nature: a collection of “facts” in order of occurrence. For us, the organizing principles of time and chronology are given, not constructed. We see chronology as simply providing a stable order for a universal reckoning of “years” in which “facts happen.” But Byzantines and other medieval and ancient authors do not seem to have viewed chronographies in this way, for to compose a new chronography was to make the amorphous past into years, to actively construct the annual sequences which we take for granted as a stable historical time. By starting from the advent of the material universe, chronicles made the very activity of reckoning time a central outcome of the work.¹⁴

How does this apply to our goal of establishing the facts about iconoclasm? To produce *our* historical facts we must attune ourselves to what we are reading, bringing our own agendas to these texts with caution, for the Byzantines did not write chronicles to provide us with “facts” about anything. We need to pay close attention to the appearance, context, and self-descriptions of these works.¹⁵ If in practice their generic designations turn out to be a rather loose, it nevertheless does not follow that because “chronicle” or “chronography” is a capacious genre, entitling a work as such is a null-value communicative act. Giving credence to the Byzantines’ generic choices reminds us that people of the past were not interested in answering the same questions about the past as we are. As we will see, investigating how and why chronicles were crafted allows us to open up wider spectrums for historical study by contextualizing our “facts” within the political or “social logic” of these texts.¹⁶

12 Forms comparable to the chronicle are utilized today when attempting to represent the history of the universe, such as in Wilson Alvarez’ *Chronozoom*. <http://www.chronozoom.com/>.

13 Ian Wood, “Universal Chronicles in the Early Medieval West,” *Medieval Worlds* 1 (2015), 47–60.

14 Jesse Torgerson, “Time and Again: Early Medieval Chronography and the Recurring Holy First-Created Day of George Synkellos,” in Nancy van Deusen and Leonard Michael Koff (eds.), *Time: Sense, Space, Structure*, (Leiden: 2016), 18–57.

15 See, and compare: “Historiography” and “Chronicle” in Alexander Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: 1991).

16 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*. (Baltimore: 1999).

1.1 *Theophanes and George the Synkellos*

By far the most important source for the period 602–813 is what is usually called the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor.¹⁷ Theophanes was born to a rich family and his father served under the iconoclast Constantine V. In ca. 780 Theophanes abandoned his budding secular career, instead founding a monastery in Bithynia and becoming its abbot. A committed iconophile, he refused to submit to the reintroduction of iconoclasm in 815, was arrested, and died in prison. Due to this, and above all to his hugely influential and distinctly anti-iconoclast *Chronicle*, Theophanes was celebrated as an iconophile martyr, a Confessor for the faith.¹⁸

While most scholars are content with attributing the *Chronicle* to the historical figure of Theophanes the Confessor, questions about this attribution remain.¹⁹ It is without debate, however, that regardless of who he was, the *Chronicle* was not conceived by Theophanes. Rather, the *Chronicle* is the latter part of the *Chronography*, a world or “universal” chronicle planned by George, a monk and former *synkellos*—a very high-ranking advisor to the patriarch. From this point forward we will use the title *Chronography* to refer to the combined work of both authors.

We know far less about George than we do about Theophanes.²⁰ George was either born in Syria-Palestine or spent time there. As a *synkellos* he would have been well-educated and connected. He served Tarasios, the patriarch who presided over the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, underscoring the connection between this work and the iconophile cause. Possibly George was exiled in 808 for conspiring against Nikephoros I, maybe even to Theophanes’ monastery. Around this point he began compiling his *Chronography*, but on his deathbed in ca. 810–13 he had only completed the project up to 283/84.²¹ There is little else that can definitively be said about George.

17 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1883–85). Volume 1 is translated into English in Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* (Oxford: 1997). Volume 2 is the Latin version of Theophanes produced in ca. 871–74 in Rome by Anastasius Bibliothecarius. Given Theophanes’ importance, the scholarly literature is understandably vast. For a starting point, see Marek Jankowiak and Federico Montinaro, *Studies in Theophanes*, TM 19 (Paris: 2015) and Leonora Neville, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing* (Cambridge: 2018), 61–71.

18 For biographical details and their sources, see Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 63–67.

19 Constantin Zuckerman, “Theophanes the Confessor and Theophanes the Chronicler, Or, A Story of Square Brackets,” TM 19 (2015), 31–52.

20 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 38–51.

21 George the Synkellos, *Chronography*, ed. Alden Mosshammer, *Ecloga Chronographica* (Leipzig: 1984); trans. William Adler and Paul Tuffin, *The Chronography of George Synkellos* (Oxford: 2002). For a starting point, see Neville, *Historical Writing*, 56–60.

What is clear from the *Chronography* is that George's aim was to create a narrative from Creation to his present, organized by reckoning the *Annus Mundi*. The *Annus Mundi* ("Year of the World") chronological system ran from Creation, which was dated in George's computation to the equivalent of 25 March 5492 B.C.²² According to the *Preface* of Theophanes, George entrusted Theophanes—his "good friend" (γνήσιος φίλος)—with the project's completion, though the exact form of the *Chronography* which George bequeathed to Theophanes remains an open question.²³ Scholars largely agree that Theophanes made his final additions at some point between the last entry on the accession of Leo V in 813, but before Leo's reintroduction of iconoclasm in 815, for this staunchly iconophile text has nothing but praise for the iconoclast emperor.

This complex genesis has left scholars with many interpretative difficulties. The first is the modern practice of reading George and Theophanes' contributions separately, reflected in the fact they have separate critical editions and English translations. However, the manuscript tradition makes clear that Byzantines usually read the *Chronography* as a single work.²⁴ Exactly how this context affected the narrative of iconoclasm is as yet unclear. It does, however, reinforce just how much George/Theophanes were concerned with time. Apart from the rigid adherence to the *Annus Mundi* architecture, most manuscripts contain an elaborate rubric under each *AM* date listing the regnal years of the Roman emperor, the Persian shah and then the caliphs, and (far less completely) the five patriarchs. Despite, or perhaps because, of such dedication to chronological exactitude, many events are not placed under the correct *AM* date. Indeed, Theophanes systematically dates events one *AM* entry too early from 609/10–684/85 and 725/26–772/73. Fortunately, Theophanes often includes an indiction date, a 15-year cycle beginning 1 September and linked to the tax system, which is usually to be preferred to the *AM* date.²⁵ Most such errors have now been shown to be the remnants of Theophanes' significant achievement: to place a variety of sources that employed different dating

22 For the various systems of universal annual reckoning used over the course of the Byzantine period see: Venance Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines, Vol I: La Chronologie* (Paris: 1958).

23 Marek Jankowiak, "Framing Universal History: Syncellus' Canon and Theophanes' Rubrics," *TM* 19 (2015), 53–72.

24 Filippo Ronconi, "La première circulation de la 'Chronique de Théophane': Notes paléographiques et codicologiques," *TM* 19 (2015), 121–148; Torgerson, "From the Many, One? The Shared Manuscripts of the *Chronicle* of Theophanes and the *Chronography* of Synkellos" *TM* 19 (2015), 93–120.

25 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, lxxiii–lxxiv; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 75–76.

systems (if they gave precise dates at all) into a strict *Annus Mundi* framework while avoiding the “major chronological discrepancies that would have invalidated his chronological framework.”²⁶ However, as we shall see below some “misdating” is better read as deliberate, serving a specific narrative purpose.

Considerable scholarship has been devoted to the problem of delineating the extent to which George rather than Theophanes was responsible for the entirety of the text.²⁷ Fortunately for the historian of iconoclasm, it makes little difference which was more responsible. Both were iconophiles, whose text in part sought to demonstrate how orthodox rulers prospered and heretics were punished. Both were monks and belonged to a privileged echelon of Byzantine society. Thus, it is not surprising that the iconoclasts are blasted for their ignorance, while they were resisted by monks and men “prominent by birth and culture.”²⁸ The *Chronography* was also written in a particular and relatively short timeframe, ca. 808–13, that is right at the end of the iconophile intermission. This might explain why it contains more detail and invective against the iconoclasts than the other prime source for first iconoclasm, namely the *Short History* of Nikephoros probably composed in the 780s, despite clearly sharing many of the same sources. Most obviously, the Isaurian dynasty was no more and so there was no downside to attacking it. Moreover, revisionists argue that a flurry of anti-iconoclast stories developed during the intermission that George/Theophanes could add to the balder narrative of Nikephoros, such as the story of the destruction of the Chalke icon. Finally, George/Theophanes were writing during a period of political turmoil and military defeat that was undermining the legitimacy of icon-veneration as a path to divine favour. Notably, one of the last events recorded in the *Chronography* is of iconoclasts praying at the tomb of Constantine V to “Arise and help the State that is perishing!”²⁹ The political status quo that had arisen after the iconophile victory in 787 was clearly under threat. Both George and Theophanes were keen to undercut the iconoclasts by presenting Leo III and Constantine V in as unflattering a light as possible.

26 Jankowiak, “Framing Universal History,” 72.

27 Most recently: Andrzej Kompa, “In search of Syncellus’ and Theophanes’ Own Words: The authorship of the *Chronographia* Revisited,” *TM* 19 (2015), 73–92; and Andrzej Kompa, “Gnesioi Filoi: The Search for George Syncellus’ and Theophanes the Confessor’s Own Words, and the Authorship of Their Oeuvre,” *Studia Ceranea* 5 (2015), 155–230. See also: Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, xliii–lxiii; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 38–77.

28 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 405, trans. Mango and Scott, 560.

29 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 501, trans. Mango and Scott, 684.

Nevertheless, for all the *Chronography's* invective against the Isaurian emperors, its denunciation of the iconophile Nikephoros I (r. 802–811) is even more implicitly vitriolic, depicting that emperor as a new coming of the Egyptian Pharaoh of Exodus. We must keep in mind that such prominent figures as George and Theophanes would also have been fully invested in more recent political upheavals, none of which split on iconophile vs. iconoclast lines. Those which the *Chronography* itself takes a stance on include: the Moechian controversy of the 790s, the controversial election of Patriarch Nikephoros I (r. 806–815), and the failed revolt of the *quaestor* Arsaber against emperor Nikephoros I in 808, which revolt the *Chronography* presents in a very favorable light.

While the question of the *Chronography's* authorship might make little difference to the scholar of iconoclasm, the extent to which either George or Theophanes merely reproduced their sources, many of which are now lost, does significantly affect interpretation. Many detect a light editorial hand, Treadgold declaring that “even more than most Byzantine Chronicles, Theophanes’ *Chronography* is a pastiche of its sources.”³⁰ Unfortunately, because so much of his source-base is lost any interpretation of whether what appears in the *Chronography* is the work of Theophanes, George, or the source they were excerpting from can never be more than educated guesswork. On the other hand, although only preserved in a text composed ca. 808–13, much of the text was created earlier and closer to the events it purports to record, which for some increases its reliability.³¹ At the very least it is clear there was some re-editing, re-arrangement, and above all selection of material.³² This was inevitable if for no other reason than trying to fit material into the *Annus Mundi* structure.³³ Moreover, the sources available to George/Theophanes did not of themselves create a neat, coherent narrative. The authors had to make choices in what to select and how to include it. In each case historians must make their own decisions about whether details and rhetoric are more the creation of these sources than George/Theophanes.

Take for instance the presentation of Leo III. When he first appears defending Constantinople in 717 Leo is described as “the pious emperor.”³⁴ Yet noting

30 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 68.

31 See for instance Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 17–27.

32 Jakov Ljubarskij, “Concerning the Literary Technique of Theophanes the Confessor,” *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995), 317–22; Alexander Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature, I: 650–850* (Athens: 1999), 205–34.

33 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, lxxiv–xcv; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 68–75.

34 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 396, trans. Mango and Scott, 545.

the birth of Constantine v in 718 suddenly Leo was “the impious emperor,” the father of the even more impious Constantine, whose future heresy was foretold by his defecating in his own baptismal font.³⁵ One solution for this sudden shift would have Theophanes mechanically copying his sources. The long-noted frequently close concordance between Theophanes and Nikephoros’ *Short History* is proof that both used a common Byzantine source covering the period 668–ca. 720, identified by some as the work of Trajan the Patrician. This is supposed to have been a pro-Leo text composed before iconoclasm, hence being able to describe Leo as “pious.” It was then continued, perhaps up to ca. 780, by an iconophile.³⁶ Perhaps this iconophile continuation actually began here, and included the “impious” description? An almost identical line sans the attack for impiety is found in Nikephoros, who also does not include the story of Constantine befouling the font.³⁷ Did Theophanes relate the full story, while Nikephoros’ more concise and less strident account only offered the bare facts? Or was the original text essentially that relayed by Nikephoros to which Theophanes added the “impious” tag and the moralizing tale? If so, was the “pious” description a deliberate contrast, Leo III wining victories when he was orthodox, while condemned as “impious” as a foreshadow of his and his son’s future iconoclasm?

The *Chronography* of George and Theophanes is for all these reasons a difficult text. Yet it remains our single most important source. Indeed, it more than any other text set the historical understanding of the period, not only for modern scholars, but for subsequent generations of Byzantines.

1.2 *The Successors of George the Synkellos and Theophanes*

Another “universal chronicle” following in the mould of George and Theophanes is that of George the Monk, running from Creation till the restoration of icons in 843.³⁸ Mostly composed under the reign of Michael III (842–67), it was probably finished after 867 or 870.³⁹ George’s style is generally denigrated, along with his factual accuracy. Largely reliant on Theophanes for the 7th and 8th centuries, George is even more vituperative towards the iconoclasts.

35 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 399–400, trans. Mango and Scott, 551.

36 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, lxxxvii–lxviii; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 17–27.

37 Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington, DC: 1990), 56.

38 George the Monk, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor and Peter Wirth, *Georgii Monachi Chronicon* (Stuttgart: 1978). For overviews of the text, see Dmitry Afingonev, “The Date of *Georgios Monachos* Reconsidered,” *BZ* 92 (1999), 437–47; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 172–73; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 114–120; Neville, *Byzantine Historical Writing*, 87–92.

39 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 115–116.

Nevertheless, George's account is the only directly transmitted, relatively contemporary account of the whole Second Iconoclast period. Indeed, iconoclasm shaped his text directly, the entire history of the world emplotted to conclude with the Triumph of Orthodoxy. George writes from a monastic perspective, but not that of the important Studite monastery in Constantinople. Though clearly not as influential as Theophanes, the large number of surviving manuscripts speaks to George's relatively substantial readership.⁴⁰

Apart from George, our principal sources of historical information for the period of Second Iconoclasm and its aftermath are four continuators of Theophanes, namely Symeon *Logothetes* (or *Magistros*),⁴¹ Pseudo-Symeon Magistros,⁴² Joseph Genesios,⁴³ and Theophanes Continuatus.⁴⁴ All were written from a much later perspective, that of the mid-to-late-10th-century Macedonian dynasty, during a period when iconoclasm had become a largely settled part of Byzantine historical memory, remembered and condemned as an imperial heresy. All four start where Theophanes left off, namely the reign of Leo V the Armenian. Furthermore, all four texts stand in close and complex relation to each other.⁴⁵ Most relevant for the history of Second Iconoclasm is the general scholarly agreement that the works of George the

40 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 490 lists 20 complete manuscripts and 33 fragments.

41 The text exists in two versions. Judging from the manuscripts, the distinctly more popular version is edited by Staffan Wahlgren, *Symeonis Magistri et Logothetae chronicon*, *CFHB* 44.1 (Berlin: 2006). For Version B one is still reliant on Immanuel Bekker, *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia* (Bonn: 1842), 3–331. Apart from the critical edition, see Warren Treadgold, "The Chronological Accuracy of the Chronicle of Symeon the Logothete for the Years 813–845," *DOP* 33 (1979), 157–97.

42 Edited as "Symeon Magister" in Immanuel Bekker, *Theophanes Continuatus, Ioannes Cameniata, Symeon Magister, Georgius Monachus*, *CSHB* 43 (Bonn: 1838), 603–760. See also Francois Halkin, "Le règne de Constantin d'après la chronique inédite du Pseudo-Syméon," *Byzantion* 29–30 (1959–60), 11–27.

43 Joseph Genesios, *On the Reigns of Emperors*, ed. Annie Lesmueller-Werner and Hans Thurn, *Iosephi Genesii Regum Libri Quatuor* (Berlin: 1978); trans. Anthony. Kaldellis, *Genesios on the Reigns of the Emperors* (Canberra: 1998). See also Athanasios Markopoulos, "Genesios: A Study," in Sofia Kotzabassi and Giannis Mavromatis (eds.), *Realia Byzantina* (Berlin: 2009), 137–150.

44 Edited and translated Michael Featherstone and Juan Signes-Codoñer, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I-IV* (Berlin: 2015). See also Juan Signes-Codoñer, "The Author of *Theophanes Continuatus* I-IV and the Historical Excerpts of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus," in Laszlo Horvath und Erika Juhasz (eds.), *Investigatio Fontium II: Griechische und lateinische Quellen mit Erläuterungen* (Budapest: 2017), 17–42.

45 On the relationship between these, the precise and clear discussion in Featherstone and Codoñer, *Chronographiae*, 20*–28*, is essential.

Monk, Pseudo-Symeon, and Symeon the Logothete all drew upon some kind of historical “epitome” covering the period from Leo v’s accession in 813 to Theophilos’ death in 842. The information provided by all four continuators should be compared to that of the 11th-century *Synopsis Historion* of John Skylitzes.⁴⁶ This is because Skylitzes appears to have had access to versions of either the “Common Source” that all four drew upon, or better manuscript versions of the four than those that survive today.⁴⁷

Another important 9th-century work is the so-called *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*, the “unidentified writer on Leo [v] the Armenian.” This abruptly begins in December 811 and breaks off in February 816. Clearly penned by an iconophile, it has become probably the most important text for the rise of Leo v and the reintroduction of iconoclasm. Crucially, it contains details unknown to Theophanes or his continuators, the latter of whom do not seem to have been aware of the *Scriptor*’s existence. It thus provides an independent account of this critical period. Another fragment that probably comes from the same chronicle describes Nikephoros i’s disastrous campaign against the Bulgars in 811, the shock of which was a major factor in the return of iconoclasm.⁴⁸

1.3 *Syriac and Arabic Chronicles*

While Byzantinists of all eras gain from studying sources produced beyond Byzantium, the particular difficulties of the iconoclast period make this a necessity. In the realm of chronicles that means especially engaging with those produced in the Caliphate, mostly in Syriac. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the Syriac historiographical tradition is as well preserved—and in many senses better preserved—than the Greek.⁴⁹ In variety and scope of

46 Hans Thurn (ed.), *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, *CFHB* 5 (Berlin: 1973) (Berlin: 1973); trans. John Wortley, *John Skylitzes: A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge: 2010).

47 Featherstone and Codoñer, *Chronographiae*, 20*–28*.

48 Francesca Iadevaia, *Scriptor Incertus* (2nd ed., Messina: 1997). We await the updated edition of Athanasios Markopoulos, *Scriptor Incertus de Leo Armenio* (Berlin: forthcoming). See Athanasios Markopoulos, “La Chronique de l’an 811 et le *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio*: Problèmes des relations entre l’hagiographie et l’histoire,” *Revue des études byzantines* 57 (1999), 255–62.

49 Scott Johnson and Jack Tannous maintain an annotated bibliography on Syriac studies at the website syri.ac, hosted by the University of Oklahoma. See also Sebastian Brock, “Syriac Historical Writing: A Survey of the Main Sources,” *Journal of the Iraq Academy, Syriac Corporation* 5 (1979), 1–30; Robert Hoyland “Arabic, Syriac, and Greek Historiography in the First Abbasid Century: An Inquiry into Inter-Cultural Traffic,” *ARAM* 3 (1991), 211–33; and Maria Conterno, “Christian Arabic Historiography at the Crossroads between the Byzantine, the Syriac, and the Islamic Traditions,” in Aaron Butts and Robin

contemporary voices it is richer than the Greek texts in its coverage of the 8th century. Moreover, while inevitably more detailed about events in the Near East, their notices on Byzantium are far from negligible. And the overall picture of the Isaurian emperors in particular is notably different from our Byzantine sources. Take for instance the *Chronicle of Zuqnūn*, composed in 775/76 in the monastery of the same name in northern Mesopotamia.⁵⁰ This has a very positive message about Leo III and Constantine V, the former called “courageous, strong, and warlike” as well as “of Syrian extraction.”⁵¹ Not only does their iconoclasm not bother the author, it is not even mentioned. The only iconoclast ruler is Yazid II.⁵²

The most influential Syriac chronicle, however, is no longer extant. Indeed, of the many now lost works referred to in our surviving sources, none were as influential as the *Chronicle* of Theophilos of Edessa.⁵³ Composed in the mid-to-late-8th century, it provided an account of events, largely in the Near East, up to ca. 750. Although lost, an indication of what it said can be gained from a comparison of events given in the four chronicles most indebted to it, namely by the Greek Theophanes, the Arabic Agapius of Manbij (fl. 940s),⁵⁴ and two Syriac chronicles by Michael the Syrian (d. 1199),⁵⁵ and the *Chronicle of 1234*,⁵⁶ who were both also relying on the chronicle of Dionysius of Telmahre (d. 845). Robert Hoyland has gathered and translated these notices, and although the

Darling Young (eds.), *Syriac Christian Culture: Beginnings to Renaissance* (Washington DC: 2020).

50 Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Chronicon Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum I & II*, *cSCO* 91 and 104 (Louvain: 1927–33); trans. Amir Harrak: *The Chronicle of Zuqnūn Parts I and II: From the Creation to the Year 506/7 AD* (Piscataway, NJ: 2017).

51 Harrak, *Zuqnūn*, 151.

52 Harrak, *Zuqnūn*, 155.

53 There has been a flourishing of recent work on Theophilos. The starting point is Robert Hoyland, *Theophilos of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool: 2011). For a more limited take on Theophilos as a source for Theophanes, see Maria Conterno, “Theophilos, ‘the more likely candidate’? Towards a reappraisal of the question of Theophanes’ Oriental source(s),” *TM* 19 (2015), 383–400; and “Historiography across the Borders: The Case of the Islamic Material in Theophanes’ *Chronographia*,” in Hagit Amirav and István Perczel (eds.), *Christian Historiography Between the Empires (4th to 8th centuries)* (Leuven: 2019).

54 Agapius, *History*, ed. A. A. Vasiliev, ‘Kitab al-Unvan: Histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj’, Part 2.2, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912).

55 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *La Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche*, 4 vols (Paris: 1889–1924); trans. Robert Bedrosian, *The Chronicle of Michael the Great, Patriarch of the Syrians* (Long Branch, NY: 2013).

56 *Chronicle to 1234*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Chabot, *Anonymi auctoris chronicon ad A.C. 1234 pertinens*, *cSCO* 81 and 82 (Paris: 1916–20), and Albert Abouna, *cSCO* 354 (Louvain: 1974).

reconstructed text of Theophilos can never be more than hypothetical, this provides a handy comparison and English translation of large portions of these four significant texts, covering the period 590–767. What is notable for the scholar of Byzantium is the good press the Isaurians generally receive in Agapius, Michael the Syrian, and the *Chronicle of 1234*, in marked contrast to Theophanes. Moreover, the issue of Byzantine iconoclasm in particular has distinctly less saliency, though both its origins under Leo III and the convocation of Hiereia in 754 are mentioned.⁵⁷ This divergence reflects not only the different editorial choices of these authors, but also those of the Greek translator of Theophilos, who also extended the text up until 780. Indeed, it has been plausibly suggested that the translator was none other than George Synkellos, who either came from Palestine or spent time there.⁵⁸

1.4 Case Study: *The Latins and the Origins of Iconoclasm in the Chronography*

The historical origins of Byzantine iconoclasm are, of course, a matter for continuous debate. If there is one moment in Theophanes that can be said to be the “start” of iconoclasm, it is the story of Leo III ordering (in the aftermath of the eruption of Thera) the removal of the icon from above the Chalke gate to the palace, usually preserved under the entry for *Annus Mundi* 6218, i.e. 725–26 A.D. Scholars have demonstrated reasons to doubt whether this event ever took place.⁵⁹ We are not concerned here with the historical reality of this famous moment. Rather, we shall focus on how Theophanes (more particularly the different manuscript traditions) locate this event within the narrative in order to frame the moment and so give it meaning.

To begin with, the information contained under this one *Annus Mundi* year includes material from indictions 9 (725/26) and 10 (726/27).⁶⁰ Whether intended or not, this has the result of embedding the singular action of removing the Chalke icon into an extended narrative of destruction, resistance, and persecution, including the purportedly iconophile revolt in Hellas and the Cyclades, and the Arab siege of Nicaea, where an errant soldier was supposedly killed by the Virgin for destroying one of her icons.

57 Hoyland, *Theophilos*, 224–25, 292–93.

58 Hoyland, *Theophilos*, 10.

59 Marie-France Auzépy, “La destruction de l’icône du Christ de la Chalce par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?” *Byzantion* 40 (1990), 445–92; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 128–35.

60 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 561, n. 2.

Furthermore, while all manuscripts agree on the substantive content of this entry, the earliest Greek manuscripts do not actually date these events to the *Annus Mundi*.⁶¹ The rubricated Greek manuscripts (i.e., the recension of *Wake Greek 5* and *VG 155*) use the tenth year of the Emperor Leo III to date the entry. The non-rubricated Greek manuscript (*PG 1710*) simply heads the entry with the formulaic phrase “in this year.” This leads to a subtle but nonetheless interesting point. The start of iconoclasm in Theophanes is “dated” in both Greek recensions by indiction and Leo’s reign, not in terms of a year of the world or of the incarnation. In other words, 9th-century chronographers thought of this event in terms of when it occurred in the Emperor Leo’s reign. In a sense, the first iconoclast acts were plotted outside the timeline of the world proceeding from Creation and were rather the offshoot of a heretical emperor. In what follows we will, nevertheless, continue the established practice of referring to entries in the *Chronography* by the *Annus Mundi* under which they are placed in scholarly editions and translations.

Another key way the Chalke icon incident was framed is in the material immediately preceding it. The first mention of any form of iconoclasm comes under *AM* 6215, or 722/23 A.D. There one finds the fantastical story that the Caliph Yazid II instituted iconoclasm within the Caliphate on the urgings of a Jewish magician.⁶² The reader is thus primed to associate iconoclasm with Jews and Muslims, the enemies of the Church. Should we fail to take the point, we are told “the emperor Leo partook of the same error, a grievous and illicit one.”⁶³ This version of the origins of Byzantine iconoclasm first circulated at Nicaea, though there Leo is not mentioned, the blame falling entirely on Constantine of Nakoleia.⁶⁴

Probably thanks to Theophilus of Edessa, Theophanes also had access to another account of iconoclasm’s origins, which dated it ca. 724–26. This is the version in Agapius:

61 We possess three major early transmissions of the *Chronicle*, all of which are from the last half of the 9th century (that is, between 35 and 85 years from the date at which it seems to have been first completed): two in Greek and one in Latin. These three versions would be: (1) a Greek version of the *Chronicle* dated to around 842–875 and exemplified by the manuscript *PG 1710* alone; (2) a Latin version of the *Chronicle* dated to around 870 and exemplified by the manuscript *Pal. Lat. 826*; and, (3) a second Greek version of the *Chronicle* dated to around 870–900 and exemplified by the manuscripts *Wake Greek 5* and *Vat. Gr. 155*.

62 For the evolution of this story, evidently designed to discredit the iconoclasts, see Speck, *Ich bin's nicht*.

63 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 402, trans. Mango and Scott, 555.

64 *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea*, ed. Erich Lamberg, *ACO* 2.3, 3 vols (Berlin: 2008–16), 594.

Leo ordered the images of the martyrs to be effaced from churches, residences and monasteries. When Gregory, patriarch of Rome, learned of that, he was angry and forbade the inhabitants of Rome and Italy to pay Leo taxes.⁶⁵

Theophanes placed a different version under *AM* 6217:

This year the impious emperor Leo started making pronouncements about the removal of the holy and venerable icons. When Gregory, the Pope of Rome, had been informed of this, he withheld the taxes of Italy and of Rome and wrote to Leo a doctrinal letter to the effect that the emperor ought not to make pronouncements concerning the faith nor to alter the ancient doctrines of the Church which had been defined by the holy Fathers.⁶⁶

Leo III is now explicitly branded as “impious.” “Images of martyrs” has become (all?) “the holy and venerable icons.” Pope Gregory (II) not only withholds Italy’s taxes, he also reproves Leo through a letter which establishes icon veneration as an ancient doctrine defined by the fathers. Moreover, to fit with the narrative that iconoclast action began in *AM* 6218, in *AM* 6217 Leo only “started making pronouncements” (λόγον ποιεῖσθαι), rather than explicitly ordering the removal of icons.

There are a number of slippery details in Theophanes’ account.⁶⁷ Most regard the letters supposedly sent by Gregory II to Leo as early 9th-century forgeries.⁶⁸ If so, this would be an example of Theophanes embroidering one source with another fictitious one, though that is not to say that Theophanes did not believe the letters to be genuine. Even if the letters did exist in some earlier form, they cannot on internal evidence have been written earlier than 732, and so could not have been sent in 724/25. Furthermore, the *Liber Pontificalis* makes it clear that the tax revolt happened before any imperial demands concerning iconoclasm. Theophanes also conflates Gregory II and III. Judged as a repository of “facts,” Theophanes scores lowly. However, Theophanes seems to have been doing something else. By incorporating all these elements into his story Theophanes gave a full political context to his condemnation of the

65 Agapius, *History*, 506, trans. Hoyland, *Theophilos*, 225.

66 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 404, trans. Mango and Scott, 55.

67 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 559, nn. 2–3.

68 Jean Gouillard, “Aux origines de l’iconoclasme: Le témoignage de Grégoire II?,” *TM* 3 (1968), 243–307.

iconoclasts. In the narrative of the *Chronography* it made sense for the withholding of Roman and Italian taxation to come about as a result of imperial declarations against icons, for the popes would stand up against both.

The final element in this framing is also the most complex, for the manuscripts offer two very different versions of events in *AM* 6216 (A.D. 723/24), the entry which is set between Yazid's iconoclasm and Leo's. In both of the Greek manuscript traditions (followed by de Boor in his critical edition of 1883 and in Mango and Scott's translation of 1997) the entry for *AM* 6216 highlights the story of Pope Stephen I (752–57) fleeing from the Lombards to the Franks, and crowning Pippin—celebrated as victor of the battle of Poitiers over the Arabs—as the first Carolingian king of the Franks.

Quite oddly, and unremarked upon by scholars, the first line of the entry for *AM* 6216 in the Greek manuscripts begins with a phrase that is completely unique to the entire chronicle. Every other annual entry in the entire work begins with "In this year ..." But here the text begins in the first person: "Now I come to speak. ..." In all three of the earliest Greek manuscripts this odd beginning to the entry is also made to stand out palaeographically: it is written in one or more lines of majuscule script. No other entry in the entire work receives this treatment. Quite clearly, this entry has been modified. Before offering any further analysis of this sequence's appearance in the manuscripts, or any interpretation of the text, let us examine the alternative. The Latin version of the *Chronography*—the ca. 870 translation by Anastasius Bibliothecarius—puts the same papal-Frankish alliance at the end of the entry for *AM* 6234 or A.D. 741/42, rather than the beginning of A.D. 722/23. In that placement it is not awarded any sort of unusual script.⁶⁹

It is worth noting that neither of these dates for the coronation of Pippin are "accurate." The current consensus date for this event is 754. Moreover, it was not Pippin, but his father Charles Martel who defeated the Arabs at Poitiers in 732. This kind of accuracy is not the point. Both the Latin and the Greek versions of the *Chronography* offer an interpretation of iconoclasm through their respective framing, and it is essential to take this into account before we decide what we want to do with the "data." The *Chronography* in either of the versions just mentioned framed the advent of iconoclasm in part through the empire's changing relations with the papacy. The difference between the two options available is significant enough that either one or both of these must constitute an editorial intervention at some time.

69 This is edited by de Boor as volume 2 of his edition of Theophanes, 272–273.

If one wanted to argue which version more likely represented the original, the Latin has the better claim. As mentioned above, the break in the language used to introduce the entry and the use of majuscule set the passage apart in the Greek version, while there is no such disturbance in the Latin. The narrative also is more “natural.” In the Latin manuscripts, the flight of Pope Stephen to the Franks comes as the culmination of gradually souring relations with the East, driven by both iconoclasm and taxation: the Pope finally had it with the Roman emperors and sought a new protector. In contrast, in the Greek manuscripts the northward flight of the pope seems to come out of nowhere. Furthermore, in the Latin version the episode occurs at the end of the entry, after notices about Constantinopolitan affairs. This is a much more standard sequence for the *Chronography*’s entries, while the Greek version’s placement of the story as the first event of 723/24 is odd.

Thanks to the fact that we only possess manuscripts from the mid-9th century onwards it is impossible to be certain what was the order in the original. All we can say is that already by the late 9th century two different versions of events were circulating within what we usually think of as a single source. What is the significance of the two different versions? In the Greek version, the effect of the arrangement is to put the story of the pope’s alliance with the Carolingians *just* before iconoclasm began. This is to say, iconoclasm at least in part reads as a response to the pope’s move that forced the emperor Leo III to seek to re-win God’s favour (though he made a terrible decision in *how* to do so). Thus, in the Greek version the pope is, at least partially, to blame for iconoclasm. On the other hand, in the Latin version, the story of Pope Stephen does not come until 742. Popes resist iconoclasm and Leo III’s repeated attempts to exact resources from Italy. It is only after the pope has suffered Leo’s predations that he finally flees for protection to the Carolingians. The effect of *this* dating is to make iconoclasm part of a series of imperial policies (all demonstrating an overweening imperial power) that eventually drive the pope (now the arbiter of orthodoxy) away from the Eastern empire and into the arms of the Franks. Thus in short, the Latin version—which we suggest reflects the original arrangement—claims that the iconoclast controversy was the fault of the emperors of Constantinople, while the Greek version claims that it was at least in part the fault of the Pope in Rome. At stake is whether papal betrayal, or imperial deviousness, is to blame for the rise of a heresy that would dominate the empire. Deciding which one the *Chronography* actually proposes as historically accurate determines what one thinks the *Chronography* has to say about the advent of iconoclasm.

Pausing to consider how different surviving manuscripts wrote the advent of iconoclasm into the *Chronography*’s unique sequence of universal time thus opens up new ways of thinking about what iconoclasm was and meant. Instead

of using the text of the *Chronography* to explain why George/Theophanes thought iconoclasm arose, we might admit that what has actually survived are multiple different historical explanations of it. What the original version might have looked like can remain an open question, for our manuscripts contain a multitude. Rather than attempt to accurately record facts in time, each version altered time and facts to point out different truths, answering the questions of who was responsible for iconoclasm.

2 Histories

We have already stated that the most common approach to deciding what to read as a history is to label every work which describes past events in any sort of narrativized, linear fashion a “history.”⁷⁰ However, as discussed in the previous section, most works from this period that 21st-century historians regularly label histories, actually call themselves chronicles. For this reason, most of what are normally called “histories” we placed under the previous section as “chronicles.” There is even a good argument to be made that the works named *historia* from this period actually set themselves up to be read as chronicles and so also belong in the previous section. Nevertheless, by the terms of our own definition of chronicles we believe these and several others should be read as belonging to a distinctly different genre than the chronicle.

Thus, we begin by asking: what is a history? Stratis Papaioannou has offered a formulation for history-writing over the entire Byzantine period that is worth quoting in full:

Byzantine histories may navigate between myth-making and myth-breaking. They aim at the former through encomium or teleological views of time. They gesture to the latter by alerting the reader to the impact of rhetoric on history-writing, by their consciousness of the limitations of earlier sources, or by deconstructing the aura of imperial power.⁷¹

Papaioannou is concerned with the entire Byzantine millennium, and as a result has a much more ecumenical idea of “history” than we articulate here—he pursues the concept of “historical memory” insisting that if we wish to

⁷⁰ For the practice of framing all writers or investigators of past things as “historians” see for example: Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: 2007); and Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*.

⁷¹ Papaioannou, “Byzantine *Historia*,” 302.

capture this subject we must think through how to incorporate “images” both “narrative” and “material.”⁷²

In looking at the sources concerning the iconoclast period that might best be thought of as “histories” we will be more specific in our generic definition. First in keeping with the previous discussion, we will respect works that call themselves *historia* as such. This category includes the (Greek) *Historia Syntomon* of the Patriarch Nikephoros I, the (Latin) *Historia Tripartita* of Anastasius Bibliothecarius; and the (Armenian) *History* of Łewond/Ghevond. Second, since *historiae*—unlike *chronika*—do have a continuous tradition as a genre up to the present day, we believe one does have some leeway in asking what works might we ourselves want to categorize as a *historia* even if they do not call themselves this? In this second category we include the (Greek) *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* of unknown authorship, and the (Latin) *Liber Pontificalis*. We hold that these two works (read as a collection of anecdotes and a collection of *vitae*, respectively) deserve to be studied *as history* despite not being conventionally classed and read as such. To read the *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* and *Liber Pontificalis* in this way we must set aside the desire for “a proper history” to be written by a single author and to exemplify elevated levels of prose. Granting that for certain eras such as the Ancient, Hellenistic, and even Komnenian the above criteria *are* accepted characteristics of *historia*, we seek to allow the iconoclast period to speak on its own terms. We propose that we allow “history” in our era to be defined simply as an account of the past that is: (1) not a chronicle (i.e., which narrates “events in fairly strict chronological order”),⁷³ but that instead (2) focuses its narrative(s) on experiences and oral accounts of a particular place, and (3) explicitly aims to persuade readers of how to understand the relationship between the present locality and its past. Granting this definition, we place both the Greek *Parastaseis Syntomai Chronikai* and the Latin *Liber Pontificalis* in the category of history.

2.1 *The Short History of Nikephoros*

After Theophanes, the single most important source for Byzantine history in the 7th and 8th centuries is the *Historia Syntomos*, the “Short/Concise History,” also known as the *Breviarium*, of the future patriarch Nikephoros.⁷⁴ The son of

⁷² Ibid., 298.

⁷³ Roger Scott, “Byzantine Chronicles,” in Erik Kooper (ed.), *The Medieval Chronicle*, Vol. 6 (Leiden: 2009), 31–57, 39.

⁷⁴ Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington DC, 1990); Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 171–72; Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, 26–31.

a bureaucrat, Nikephoros also joined the imperial administration, serving as an imperial secretary at Nicaea II. In 806 he succeeded Tarasios as patriarch. After resisting Leo V's attempt to reintroduce iconoclasm, he resigned in 815. He remained in exile in a monastery until his death in 828. There he penned several anti-iconoclast treatises, in the process becoming one of the principal theological defenders of icons.

The *Short History* is a fitting title. The work is a concise narrative, covering the years 602–769. As befitting the standards of classicizing history, Nikephoros wrote in Attic Greek intended to sound good to the Byzantine ear. However, he seems to have based his history on remarkably few sources. Indeed, comparison with Theophanes reveals that they shared a common source ca. 668–720, which was in turn continued perhaps to ca. 780, but, while Theophanes also wove in other material, Nikephoros seems merely to have abridged and rewritten this chronicle into a history. There is no explicit date for the *Short History*, but most have followed Mango's suggestion that the work was an "*oeuvre de jeunesse*," composed in the 780s.⁷⁵ Certainly, the lack of theological knowledge displayed at points would sit oddly with the theological sophistication of the latter patriarch. Moreover, stopping in 769 with the marriage of Irene (the future convener of Nicaea II) to Leo IV was an opportune strategy for someone writing in the 780s. It acted as a nod to Irene's position as regent, while avoiding the danger of wading into recent politics.

Compared to Theophanes, the *Short History* is both less detailed and less vehement, lacking the more lurid anti-iconoclast tales, while still explicitly condemning Leo III and Constantine V for iconoclasm. For instance, rather than the complex framing of iconoclasm's origins that we saw in Theophanes, Nikephoros succinctly has Leo reacting to the eruption of Thera in 726.⁷⁶ This relative moderation might be in part a function of style and the sheer succinctness of the text. However, it might well reflect the fact that many of the more virulent stories had yet to be generated. Certainly, the anti-iconoclast treatises Nikephoros wrote decades later in exile contain many more anti-iconoclast tales than the *Short History* and might be said to outdo Theophanes in invective.⁷⁷

2.2 *The Armenian Tradition*

While on the whole the Armenian historical tradition only infrequently comments on Byzantium during the iconoclast period, there are some interesting

75 Mango, *Nikephoros*, 12.

76 Nikephoros, *History*, 60.

77 For examples of the differences, see Mango, *Nikephoros*, 9–11.

snippets.⁷⁸ In particular, there is the *History* of Łewond or Ghevond.⁷⁹ This covers the period 632–788, and from the 660s is the only substantial Armenian historical narrative for the period. Thanks largely to its end-date, it is traditionally dated to the late 8th century, around the same time Nikephoros was composing his history. However, Greenwood has recently argued that it is more likely a work of the late 9th century, though admits that the evidence can never be conclusive.⁸⁰

Łewond is of particular interest to scholars of Byzantine iconoclasm for two reasons. First, he purports to record a letter exchange between Leo III and Caliph Umar II (on which see more below under “Letters”). Second, in what is a text generally hostile to Byzantium, both Leo III and Constantine V, when mentioned, are given startlingly good press.⁸¹ Whether genuine or not, the letter of Leo III served to establish the emperor in the text as a staunch defender of the Christian faith against Muslim critiques. This was then followed by accounts of Leo’s physical defense of Constantinople against the Arabs.⁸² This culminated in Leo performing a miracle by striking the Bosphorus with a cross, causing a storm that wrecked the Arab fleet. So positive is this version of Leo, that Stephen Gero went so far as to call it “iconoclastic hagiography,” reasoning that Łewond probably had access to an originally Byzantine pro-Leo text.⁸³ Later on, Constantine V is recorded as leading a successful campaign against Theodosiopolis, taking great booty and a fragment of the True Cross. Many locals begged to be freed from the Ishmaelites, and to join “the pious emperor’s side.”⁸⁴ In contrast, the only iconoclasm mentioned is that of Yazid II.⁸⁵

78 An overview of Armenian historical texts referencing Byzantium in the iconoclast era is in Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 197–98. Though occasionally speculative about dating, see also Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: 1973), 35–47, 132–71.

79 Łewond, *History*, ed. and Fr. trans. Bernadette Martin-Hisard and Alexan Hakobian, *Lewond Vardapet: Discours historique avec en annexe La Correspondance d'Omar et de Léon* (Paris: 2015). The most recent English translation is by Robert Bedrosian, and only available online: <https://archive.org/details/GhevondsHistoryOfArmenia>. Still useful is: Zaven Arzoumanian, *History of Lewond, the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians* (Philadelphia: 1982).

80 Timothy Greenwood, “A Reassessment of the History of Łewond,” *Le Muséon* 125 (2012), 99–167.

81 Greenwood, ‘Łewond’, 137–40.

82 Łewond, *History*, 19–20.

83 Gero, *Leo*, 36–37.

84 Łewond, *History*, 29; trans. Bedrosian.

85 Łewond, *History*, 16.

2.3 *The Latin “Histories”*

While the Latin West produced many historical texts that occasionally mention Byzantium, usually in the context of diplomatic relations, only two “histories” provide significant information on Byzantine iconoclasm.⁸⁶ The first is the *Historia Tripartita* of Anastasius Bibliothecarius.⁸⁷ Papal librarian and envoy, Anastasius was a prolific writer and translator, acting as key conduit between Constantinople and Rome in the late 9th century. This included translating into Latin the Acts of Nicaea II, and the three texts that compose his *Historia Tripartita*, namely: (1) the lists of rulers known as the *Chronographikon Syntomon* of the Patriarch Nikephoros I;⁸⁸ (2) the *Chronographia* of George Synkellos; and, (3) the *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor (recalling the latter two were discussed, above, as a single text).

How we might read Anastasius’ work of translation, editing, and organizational reframing by giving the summative title of “tripartite history” to his renaming a list of rulers and a chronicle remains a task for scholarship. Even with Anastasius’ heavy editing in translation, the annalistic format was retained and would seem to mean the edited works remained a chronicle. Nevertheless, there is Anastasius’ title. The title of Anastasius’ *Historia Tripartita* is fairly clearly an echo of Cassiodorus’ 6th-century *Historia Tripartita* (a Latin translation of the works of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret). Anastasius’ translation’s claim to Cassiodorus’ title communicates *imitatio* of Cassiodorus’ authorial persona—such a self-presentation evokes the two authors’ achievements in diplomacy and translation for the service of *Latinitas*. Does Anastasius’ choice of the title *Historia* denote historical homage, or historical genre? For now we would propose that Anastasius Bibliothecarius transformed these works into a history insofar as he turned the focus to Rome, for he changed the annalistic headings to entries by noting only years of the: world, incarnation, emperor, and pope of Rome. It is this and the changes to the narrative of Theophanes (an example of which we explored above) which are of principal interest to the scholar of Byzantine iconoclasm.

The *Liber Pontificalis* is probably the most consulted and debated non-Greek text in the entire history of Byzantine iconoclasm.⁸⁹ This is hardly surprising.

86 For a general overview, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 184–85.

87 This is edited by de Boor as volume 2 of his edition of Theophanes, 46–346.

88 Nikephoros, *Chronographikon Syntomon*, ed. Carolus de Boor, *Nicephori Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula Historica* (Leipzig: 1880), 1–77.

89 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris: 1886–92), trans. Raymond Davis, *The Book of the Pontiffs* (Liverpool: 1989); *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: 1992); *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: 1995). For this fascinating text see several recent studies by Rosamond McKitterick, including “The Papacy and Byzantium in

It is the most important source for the early medieval papacy and the city of Rome. In that context, it frequently narrates the complex relationship between Rome and Constantinople, including several passages that touch directly on Byzantine iconoclasm. It is most frequently described as a series of biographies of the popes. But what does this mean? The *Liber Pontificalis*, through all its *Lives*, has a focus on the city of Rome and the office of the papacy and so its accumulation of the lives of its successive popes in the end provides a fairly continuous narrative of both city and office. Indeed, one of its purposes was to elide the two, Rome becoming through its narrative presentation a papal city. It is in effect a “semi-official” history of the papacy.

The process of composition of this “text” is famously complex and remains an active research question for scholars of early medieval Europe. The only safe conclusion as to whom authored it is that they were members of the papal administration. Likewise, while it seems that the usual pattern from the late 7th century onwards was for a life to be composed shortly after its subject’s death, some were definitely begun and even disseminated while the pope was still alive. Moreover, the huge number of surviving manuscripts demonstrate that the text evolved, with some lives being substantially revised at a later moment, where, when, and why all being matters for debate. Though supportive of the general power of the papacy, especially vis-à-vis Byzantium and as the defender of orthodoxy, the individual lives are not bound to be uncritical of their subjects. This is because its opinions are likely to be those of officials working for a pope’s successor.⁹⁰

Byzantinists interested in incorporating evidence from the *Liber Pontificalis* for studies on the period of Byzantine iconoclasm need to be aware of these debates. At all costs, Byzantinists should avoid the temptation to haphazardly “mine” this work for information, and should take the time to familiarize themselves with the complexity of the work, not least because, as Rosamond McKitterick argues, at least a portion of the *Liber Pontificalis* seems to “represent the pope in a particular way both in relation to Byzantium in theological and political terms, and as the successor to Saint Peter in Rome.”⁹¹ In other words, it is neither a straightforward nor a “stable” text. Yet, that in itself makes it a fascinating work, which combined with its relative contemporaneity to the

the Seventh- and Early Eighth-Century Sections of the *Liber Pontificalis*,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 84 (2016), 241–73. For the problems of the 8th-century lives and a detailed examination of how one recension of the manuscripts created a different version of the *Liber Pontificalis*, see Clemens Ganter, “The Lombard Recension of the Roman *Liber Pontificalis*,” *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 10 (2013), 65–114.

90 McKitterick, “The Papacy,” 245.

91 McKitterick, “The Papacy,” 241.

events it describes, and its importance in reflecting the actions and presentation of the popes, make it an indispensable one.

2.4 Case Study: *The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai and Constantinople's Topography of Images*

Our final "history," and the one we shall examine in greatest depth, is a peculiar work called the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*.⁹² It has often been disregarded because of the nature of the material included. It is a melange of notes on the monuments of Constantinople, with a particular interest in statuary. It is easily dismissed for being "full of mythical and legendary explanations and tales."⁹³ When the work has been given a genre, it has been placed under "comic discourse,"⁹⁴ or the neologism "patriography."⁹⁵ However, the fact is the *Parastaseis* is a prose narrative of a particular locality based on experiences of past events that still fall within active memory or living oral tradition; it certainly fulfilled the role of a local history of the city of Constantinople. This makes it a *historia* for all intents and purposes, though scholars have heretofore ignored the *Parastaseis* as a history. Not only that, but we have viewed it so poorly so as to nearly leave it out of survey discussions entirely.⁹⁶

The *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* has a complex tradition of reception and transmission. In addition to its "own" manuscript, the 8th- or 9th-century *Parastaseis* is included in nearly complete form within the 10th-century *Patria Konstantinopoleos*.⁹⁷ One could discuss *Parastaseis* and the later *Patria* as either two editions of one work, or as two separate works, but for our purposes the

92 *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, ed. and trans. Averil Cameron and Judith Herrin, *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century: The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* (Leiden: 1984).

93 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 301. Even its most recent translator scales back his positive assessment with the caveat that he recommends the text "... despite its massive problems of historical reliability ..." Albrecht Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople: The Patria* (Cambridge MA: 2013), xviii.

94 Kazhdan, *Byzantine Literature*, 295–314.

95 Benjamin Anderson, "Classified Knowledge: The Epistemology of Statuary in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 35 (2011), 1–19, 2.

96 Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians*, leaves the work entirely out of his survey of historical works. In Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 301, the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai* makes a short, odd appearance under the section "Itineraries and 'Geographical' Literature" within the chapter "Official and Related Documents."

97 *Patria*, ed. Theodrus Preger, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1901–07), vol. 2. The essential work is: Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: Études sur le recueil des Patria* (Paris: 1984). Berger dates the compiler to 989/90 in Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople*, xvi.

point stands regardless: this (or these) must be carefully studied for a history of iconoclasm. First, with a *historia*'s characteristic concern with the present locale, the *Parastaseis* focuses entirely on the place in which the compilers reside in the contemporary moment in which they reside there: Constantinople.⁹⁸ Secondly, the *Parastaseis*, uniquely, accomplishes this focus by orienting the reader to the space of the city. The *Patria*'s rewriting of the original material from the *Parastaseis* takes this topographical conceit even further, rearranging the material to conform more accurately to the present geography of the city.⁹⁹ Thus, for studies of the fundamentally Constantinopolitan phenomenon of iconoclasm (a statement especially true for the Second Iconoclast period), scholars must make sense of the rise of iconoclasm within a local history of Constantinople: its people, politics, culture, and landscape. The *Parastaseis* and *Patria* give us just that: contemporary historical perspectives on the landscape and topography in which iconoclasm was played out. As Albrecht Berger puts it in his introduction to the *Patria*:

Only the *Patria* ... presents a more or less complete and coherent picture of the city as it was in the middle Byzantine period ... the most complete source about the monuments of the city that has come down to us.¹⁰⁰

Why does such a picture of the city and its monuments matter? The current scholarly consensus understands this work as the product of the class of educated "civil professionals" or "bureaucrats" that is credited with the revival of learning, education, and written culture of this period. Benjamin Anderson has recently argued these "members of the imperial bureaucracy" were also "members of old Constantinopolitan families, who opposed 'new men' in the imperial service."¹⁰¹ In this reading, the text is a part of a claim to ownership over the city through a command of the city's past, specifically the power of the past embedded in local statuary, inscriptions, and the prophetic implications

⁹⁸ Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople*, i.

⁹⁹ See Berger, ix–xii. A core of the *Parastaseis* passed into the *Patria*. The *Parastaseis*' historical notes "On Statues"—composed by a number of anonymous authors beginning with second reign of Justinian II (705–711) and into the iconoclast period of Leo III and Constantine V—consists of eighty-nine chapters. More than half of the content of the *Patria*'s Book II (with 110 distinct entries) come from these. This, combined with a smattering of 6th-century material forms about two-thirds of the content of Book II of the *Patria*, while its arrangement and the remaining one-third of the content gives us a late 10th-century perspective.

¹⁰⁰ Berger, xvii.

¹⁰¹ Anderson, "Classified Knowledge," 2.

of both for the present. More directly applied to the concerns of this present volume, these are the settings in which the debates and political intrigue over “iconoclasm” took place. The *Patria* gives us a vision of the centuries-long controversy over images playing out in a city of monasteries, churches, shrines, and fora each filled with paintings and statues. When local elites told and preserved the local history of their city, they told that history—their history—through an account of the power of images and statues and the authors’ understanding of that power. If we neglect or disparage this evidence when we tell the story of iconoclasm, it is surely to our detriment.¹⁰²

Studying the history of this text is not only a way of studying the topography of iconoclasm, but potentially the impact of iconoclasm upon the changing social role of images in general. The *Parastaseis* was compiled and composed starting with the second reign of Justinian II (705–711). It was then completed through the first iconoclast period, up to about 790. It was read and transmitted through the change from iconoclasm, back to iconophilism in 787, from iconophilism back to iconoclasm in 815, and from iconoclasm back to iconophilism in 843.¹⁰³ The 10th century compilers of the *Patria* then doubled down on the topographic image-based historical logic of this text by not only copying it, but expanding it and rationalizing its organization. Furthermore, the *Patria*’s authors’ expansions on the *Parastaseis* give us material to consider how the memory of the iconoclast period was retold during the era that follows.

What is the relative weight of this text as a “historical source”? In part it has been possible for scholars to disregard the *Parastaseis* as obscure since it survives in only one manuscript. However, if we view the *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* as belonging to a single tradition, that tradition becomes impossible to ignore: the 10th-century version of the *Patria* exists in more than 60 manuscripts. We neglect these to our great loss. This work is not only a history of Constantinople, but it is a uniquely *visual* history in an age where the visual—the image and the statue—are the specific issues in which we are interested.

To give some concrete examples, the *Parastaseis* is full of occasions that demonstrated the power invested by the Byzantines in material representations. For instance, we are told that two of the text’s researchers were studying

102 On this point concerning what we are willing and not willing to accept from our historical sources as “true,” see Robert Bartlett’s illuminating discussion on “Beings Neither Angelic, Human, nor Animal” in Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075–1225* (Oxford: 2006).

103 Similarly, about ninety years after the 10th-century compilation of the *Patria* (ca. 1080), someone further rearranged Books 2 and 3 topographically “into three sightseeing tours.” Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople*, xvi.

the pagan statues in the *Kynegion*, a disused amphitheatre on the ancient acropolis that had become a site for criminal executions.¹⁰⁴ Suddenly one of the statues, of its own accord, fell down and killed one of them. The malevolent statue had to be buried at the spot, and the passage ends by giving a warning against looking at old statues, especially pagan ones. A world where statues could kill, necessitating a physical response, was also one where icons could wield power, again necessitating a response.

There are several direct references to Leo III and Constantine V. For instance, we are told:

In the time of Leo the Isaurian, many ancient monuments were destroyed because the man was irrational. At that time the Trizodon, as it is called, was removed. It was in the hollow place below St Mokios. Up to that time many people used to perform astronomical calculations by it. And the tombs of pagans and Arians are buried there, and many other corpses.¹⁰⁵

Later on we find Constantine V criticized:

Many murders and evils took place in the Hippodrome, and especially in the times before us; among these in our own day too, Anastasius the monk was burned for contradicting the emperor in the cause of truth.¹⁰⁶

Yet overall, there are very few direct recorded instances of iconoclasm. Even the above story about Leo is overwhelmingly reconstructed from the *Patria*. We cannot be certain it was originally in the *Parastaseis*. Even if it were, Leo is recorded destroying things connected to astronomers, pagans, and heretics, not images of holy Christian figures. Elsewhere, we actually find the *Parastaseis* praising the Isaurians, such as when “Leo the Great and Pious” restored Constantinople’s walls.¹⁰⁷

Finally, differences between the *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* reveal the growing accretion of negative tales about the iconoclasts. For instance, the *Patria* includes stories about Leo closing a famous school and burning 16 monks alive inside it.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile Constantine slanderously changed the name of

104 *Parastaseis*, 27–28.

105 *Parastaseis*, 5; *Patria*, 2.90–91.

106 *Parastaseis*, 63.

107 *Parastaseis*, 3, trans. Cameron and Herrin, 59.

108 *Patria*, 3.31, 3.

a monastery from “of perfume oil” to “of fish oil,” an impressive feat given that said monastery was founded almost two centuries later.¹⁰⁹

The *Parastaseis* and the *Patria* are complex, difficult texts. Read as a repository of “facts” it/they will always prove elusive. But read as a shifting testament to the myriad of testimonies and perceptions that formed the evolving historical memory of Constantinople they are vital.

3 Letters

There are a number of important but difficult questions to overcome in approaching letters as historical sources.¹¹⁰ As Peter Hatlie succinctly put it:

Discussions about the ‘essence’, ‘nature’, and ‘function’ of the letter have often been difficult to reconcile with the task of garnering historical information from it.¹¹¹

In their introduction to the sources Haldon and Brubaker wonder whether sub-categories are actually better divisions than thinking of letters as a whole. The authors list such possibilities as theological tracts, letters concerning personal and “private” matters (on matters of career, friendship, etc.), official correspondence relating to ecclesiastical or imperial policy, and even the work of later redactors who take a text composed in a different genre entirely and edit it to make it appear to be a “letter.” But these are modern classifications on the basis of content, purpose, form, or style. Following this line of thought, “letter” devolves into merely:

a convenient way of bringing together a number of somewhat disparate and miscellaneous texts which would otherwise be difficult to accommodate under a different rubric.¹¹²

109 *Patria*, 3.134, trans. Berger, 197. For the date of the monastery’s foundation, see Berger, 197, n.135.

110 See as an introduction to the topic: Roy Gibson, “On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 102 (2012), 56–78; and Alexander Riehle (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography* (Leiden: 2020). The foundational 20th-century studies on Byzantine epistles are Nikolaos B. Tomadakes, *Byzantine epistolografia: Ekdosis trite* (Athens: 1969); Herbert Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur Der Byzantiner* (Munich: 1978), 278–79.

111 Peter Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996), 213–48, 222.

112 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 276.

A truer representation of the ancient or medieval reality might be to organize letters based on the projected mood of the author, such as good humour, seriousness, exhortation, lamentation, or jest.¹¹³

A more productive approach seems to start with the prior question: is the value of a letter inherent in the “epistolary genre” or is it of value for what it provides to historical inquiries, “a literary source with documentary value for historians”?¹¹⁴ The generic approach to epistles is sensible, is not a new suggestion, and does not preclude using letters as historical sources. As Giles Constable succinctly put it in 1976: “their worth as historical sources must always be evaluated in the light of their literary character.”¹¹⁵ More recently Littlewood and Mullett have “made a point of trying to wrest the letter from the grip of historical analysis and examine it primarily in terms of its literary value.”¹¹⁶ There is reason to be sympathetic to this approach, not least because the epistle surely *was* a genre—in the sense of having established, recognized models to follow—in our period.

What makes a letter a letter, and how does one read collections? Margaret Mullett’s brilliant studies work from readings of epistles as complex, multi-layered items: “intimate and confidential and intended for publication and one might also add, for performance—that is, we are dealing with real but literary letters.”¹¹⁷ For Peter Hatlie, viewing the literary letter as first a “work of art” forces us to pay attention to “its fitness before the laws of rhetoric and atticism.”¹¹⁸ In fact, there is good reason to read the epistle as a rhetorical act before it is a messaging act. Byzantine epistles are not a “documentary” work of literature, but a rhetorical one.¹¹⁹

113 Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: 1976), 21.

114 Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 225.

115 Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 11–12.

116 Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 226.

117 Margaret Mullett, “The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter,” in Roger Scott and Margaret Mullett (eds.), *Byzantium and the Classical Tradition* (Birmingham: 1981), 75–93, 77. Quoting Adrian Morey and Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and His Letters* (Cambridge: 1965), 13.

118 Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 227.

119 “Byzantine letters often preserve only part—the written part—of the intended message conveyed by the sender, and indeed even this message is often purposely obscured.” Hatlie, 221. Or Jakov Ljubarskij: “... the Byzantine epistolographer never went so far as to open his entire self in a letter. Following the universal law of rhetoric—accommodation (*ymestmosti*)—he, on the contrary, adapted not only his words, but also his choice of thoughts and feelings to the addressee ... Through the course of different letters it is more easy to judge the character of their addressees than that of their author.” As translated in Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 223.

As Giles Constable claimed: “the essence of the epistolary genre, both in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, was not whether a letter was actually sent but whether it performed a representative function.”¹²⁰ Identifying the letter’s “representative function” means following its “cultivation of a *persona*.”¹²¹ By treating letters as rhetoric first, we still open up important historical conclusions, even if they are not the ones we are used to finding. Describing *persona*, subjectivity, or “representative function” matters a great deal if we are to use an epistle to write history. It matters because the letter functioned as a “quasi-presence,” a “way of removing distance” between friends.¹²² The key word is “friendship.”¹²³ To study letters is to study how relationships were made and maintained through rhetoric’s ability to bridge temporal and spatial distances by creating bonds of affection.¹²⁴

First, the constructed *persona* of the letter in question matters, regardless of how much that might map onto the actual historical psychological sense of self held by a “real person.” We have in these *personae* the radical distinction between fully socio-political “public” *personae*—whose words had indirect if not direct legal implications—and politically “private” *personae*—whose words did not. That is, we might distinguish collections of: (a) epistles with legal implications (imperial and patriarchal epistles), from (b) epistles with autobiographical implications (all other epistles).

120 Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 13.

121 Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 227.

122 M. Monica Wagner, “A Chapter in Byzantine Epistolography: The Letters of Theodoret of Cyrus,” *DOP* 4 (1948), 119–81, 131–34.

123 Building on Gustav Karlsson and Herbert Hunger, Peter Hatlie pointed out a common conclusion: that within the “formulaic and ceremonial nature of Byzantine epistolography” its “function—far from sending a message—was essentially to bridge distance between friends.” Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 220. Thus Mullett’s argument that a major emphasis should be looking at “subtle ceremonial formulae ... more seriously ... and thus [as] possible evidence for the social status of and the relationship between correspondents.” We must also remember that each epistle would have arrived with not only an accompanying messenger bearing an oral message, but a gift for the recipient. Hatlie, “Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography,” 228; Mullett, “The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter,” 182–83.

124 Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 14–15. As Margaret Mullett puts it, the event of the letter itself was a literary delight: “A Byzantine intellectual would have had little understanding for this kind of criticism [that ‘Byzantine letters tend to be conventional and impersonal and ... terribly boring’]. For him the letter was something supremely precious, rare, and longed for. It was dew in a desert, a lantern in the dark, a lyre calming the spirit, the song of Orpheus or the temptation of the Sirens. It was an emanation of the spirit, a mirror of the correspondent, the icon of the soul. It was honey, fragrant flowers, the first birds of spring.” Mullett, “The Classical Tradition in the Byzantine Letter,” 77.

Second, if we focus again on the material context, we can develop an interpretative agenda based on the context of a letter's survival which gives us access to, instead of *one* "original" authorial *persona*, a new "constructed" *persona* for each surviving compilation or act of transmission. This approach may also be the best way to avoid obvious errors. To again quote Peter Hatlie:

... scholarship stays better informed when it takes account of the nature of the unified collection it is dealing with (where possible) and the peculiar generic properties of letters (where discernible). Not doing so can and does lead to incomplete or mistaken readings.¹²⁵

As Jakob Ljubarskij proposed: uncovering the nature of the collection must be a priority for interpretations of any kind:

The issue is not merely how many letters are included or lost and why, but also whether letter writers or the editors of their works shaped a collection for this purpose or that, effectively distorting our image of its literary or historical value.¹²⁶

Byzantinists will find productive models for approaching these issues in recent guides covering the epistolography of the ancient and late antique periods.¹²⁷

3.1 *Letter Collections, Byzantine and Modern*

Two relatively massive collections dominate Byzantine epistles from the iconoclast era: that of Theodore the Studite has 564 letters on record,¹²⁸ that of Patriarch Photios 299.¹²⁹ After these two, sixty-four epistles of Ignatios of Nicaea survive, and no one else is credited with more than a half dozen.¹³⁰

125 Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 247.

126 As translated in Hatlie, "Redeeming Byzantine Epistolography," 247.

127 Ruth Morello and A. D. Morrison (eds.), *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford: 2007). Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J Watts (eds.), *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide* (Berkeley, CA: 2019).

128 Georgios Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 2 vols, *CFHB* 31 (Berlin: 1992). The surviving collected epistles were written between 797 and 826.

129 B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerink, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, 3 vols (Leipzig: 1983–85). For a partial translation, see D.S. White, *Patriarch Photios of Constantinople* (Brookline MA: 1981). The surviving collected epistles of Photios were written between 859 and 886.

130 Cyril Mango, *The Correspondence of Ignatios the Deacon*, with the collaboration of Stephanos Efthymiadis, *CFHB* 39 (Washington, DC: 1997). The letters were written from

This means that, of all the letters surviving from our period, two individuals account for about 85 per cent of the total. Not only that, but the volume of the surviving letters from Theodore alone dominates Byzantine epistolography *as a whole*. It is no easy task to confront this massive archive and ask: what is the value of the letters of Theodore the Studite for study of iconoclasm? Surely we must start by reading these collections for what they are: not so much as individual documents as much as portraits of the intellectual and cultural life of the *constructed* authorial persona to whom they testify.¹³¹

By contrast, there is a vast difference between these personal collections and the individual epistles listed in Franz Dölger's register as imperial letters.¹³² The three epistolary collections mentioned above stand apart as literary achievements in their own right; the imperial letters are almost entirely catalogued traces of a tiny fraction of the work of the imperial notarial departments. Arranging these into an "archive" is the reconstructive work of modern scholars. Most of the imperial "letters" are either: (1) reconstructions of the basic content of a letter from a historical source; (2) simply noting the fact of an epistle having been sent (e.g., to accompany a known embassy); (3) reconstructions of a letter based on a surviving reply (e.g., when preserved in the archives of papal letters). That is, our register of imperial letters primarily indicates we know a communication was sent, rather than that the document in question may be retrieved and read.

Only a scant few of these letters have any direct bearing on the question of iconoclasm. This is in itself suggestive. Iconoclasm was an element of the period, important undoubtedly, but not the be-all and end-all. The most discussed letters concerning iconoclasm are either embedded in the *acta* of Nicaea II (in particular the letters of Germanos) or are most likely iconophile tracts written long after their purported timeframe (such as the letters of Gregory II to Leo III), and as such are considered in the following chapter. Besides these we are left with two "imperial" letters to discuss.

ca. 820 to ca. 845, covering the author's time as bishop and then the latter period of his life as a monk.

131 For an example of this approach see: Bradley K Storin, *Self-Portrait in Three Colors: Gregory of Nazianzus's Epistolary Autobiography* (Christianity in Late Antiquity) 6 (Berkeley, CA: 2019).

132 Franz Dölger, Johannes Preiser-Kappeller, Alexander Riehle, and Andreas Müller, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Rechts von 565–1453*, 2 vols (Munich: 2003–09). Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 281–82 provide a summary of all extant imperial letters, though the recent update to Dölger's register mean that several of the dates have changed.

One was sent in 824 by Michael II to Louis the Pious.¹³³ The first two-thirds recounts Michael's accession and the prolonged civil war with Thomas the Slav. The last third explains to the Frankish emperor Byzantium's icon policy at the time. It is, therefore, that rarest of things for this period: an essentially unfiltered iconoclast document. As such, it has a starring role in scholarship of Second Iconoclasm. What is striking is the relative mildness of the iconoclasm. Only icons low down in a church should be removed, while those higher up could be maintained. It also provides a list of "abuses" caused by easily accessible icons: they had replaced crosses; candles and incense were lit before them; some clergy scraped material from them and added it to the Eucharist; some were using them as sponsors for their children at baptism; some were using icons as altars.

The second is, like most "imperial" letters, embedded in another text, in this case the aforementioned *History* of Lewond.¹³⁴ The *History* purports to give an exchange between Leo III and Umar II. While Lewond's version of Umar's letter is evidently a reconstruction from the points made in Leo's, a fuller and potentially "original" version has been reconstructed from other texts.¹³⁵ These are complex texts that likely went through several stages of editing and interpolation. Indeed, many scholars argue that both letters were created in the late 8th or early 9th century as part of ongoing Muslim-Christian debate, the authors simply putting their arguments into the mouths of famously pious rulers.¹³⁶ However, the most recent analysis by Greenwood argues that there was most likely a genuine core.¹³⁷ It is a fact that an exchange is mentioned in our surviving narrative sources, including those that were heavily influenced by Theophilos of Edessa. Yet again these sources give us different spins on the same information. While Agapius has Leo making clear Islam's falsity and Christianity's truth, Theophanes only mentions that Leo received a letter from Umar that attempted to convert him, slyly leaving the impression that Leo was already "Saracen-minded."¹³⁸ More important is Leo's argument, for

133 Michael II, *Epistula ad Ludovicum Imperatorem*, ed. Albert Werminghoff, *MGH, Leges* III, *Concilia* II.2 (Hanover: 1908), 475–80; partially translated by Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: Sources and Documents* (London: 1986), 157–58.

134 Lewond, 14. For a translation and commentary, see Arthur Jeffery, 'Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III', *Harvard Theological Review* 37 (1944), 269–332.

135 J.-M. Gaudeul, 'The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar: 'Umar's Letter Re-discovered?', *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), 109–57.

136 Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw it* (Princeton: 1997), 490–501.

137 Greenwood, 'Lewond', 154–64.

138 Agapius, *History*, 503; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 399.

he supports religious figural imagery, while giving it distinctly less significance and textual space than other Christian symbols such as the cross. If this does reflect Leo's self-presentation before iconoclasm it is significant evidence for the context of his later actions. If not, it at least is an example of how the historical memory of the Isaurians was distinctly different and more positive outside Byzantium than within.

3.2 *Case Study: The Letters of Theodore Studites as a Collection on Iconoclasm?*

Opinions on how to use the epistles of Theodore Studites vary greatly. In his 2015 translation of select works of Theodore, Thomas Cattoi included only one of Theodore's letters, from Theodore to his uncle Plato. Cattoi's goal was to "offer to an English-speaking public *all* [our emphasis] the writings of Theodore that were devoted to the question of the veneration of sacred images."¹³⁹ While from the theologian's perspective, only one letter of the surviving 564 may be truly "devoted to the question," historians have tended to see the letters of Theodore as originating out from the controversy over icons, making iconoclasm the collection's central concern. On the other hand, historians have also put the works of Theodore Studites to an array of other ends. Patricia Karlin-Hayter argued that the early epistles of Theodore were not so much about iconoclasm as about the power of monks *vis-à-vis* the bishops.¹⁴⁰ Ihor Ševčenko used the same corpus to ask what the levels of persecution and their geographic contexts, as revealed in Theodore's surviving letters, could tell us about the extent of the power of the Byzantine state.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Paul Alexander used the letters of Theodore to look at the means, extent, and justification for persecution of disempowered groups in general.¹⁴² On the other hand, Stephanos Efthymiadis has emphasized the prosopographical value of Theodore's letters, the possibilities of using his addressees to further describe other historical individuals, and piece together snippets of their biographies.¹⁴³ Finally, recent studies have turned the corpus to gender studies, looking at Theodore's correspondence

139 Thomas Cattoi, *Theodore the Studite: Writings on Iconoclasm* (New York: 2015), 1.

140 Patricia Karlin-Hayter, "A Byzantine Politician Monk, St Theodore Studite," *Jahrbuch Der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994), 217–32, 218–19.

141 Ihor Ševčenko, "Was There Totalitarianism in Byzantium? Constantinople's Control over Its Asiatic Hinterland in the Early Ninth Century," in Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (eds.), *Constantinople and Its Hinterland* (Aldershot: 1995), 91–105.

142 Paul J. Alexander, "Religious Persecution and Resistance in the Byzantine Empire of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Methods and Justifications," *Speculum* 52 (1977), 238–64.

143 Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Notes on the Correspondence of Theodore the Studite," *Revue des études byzantines* 53 (1995), 141–63.

with Irene the Patrician,¹⁴⁴ or Kassia the abbess, hymnographer, and poet to find that “in ninth-century Byzantium there was some window of opportunity for women of Kassia’s calibre.”¹⁴⁵ Clearly there is a great deal of creative and productive work that remains to be done by exploiting the potential in Theodore’s letters for social history.

However, our goal here is to suggest productive new avenues of research by now considering the manuscript context, asserting that attention to both the material reality of survival and the generic context of a letter collection can better inform our studies. Over the course of his life Theodore Studites wrote not merely the 564 letters which scholars have been able to recover but over twice that number, at least 1,146 letters.¹⁴⁶ We cannot be completely sure as no manuscripts agree on the number of letters, let alone the actual corpus. As we have just seen, work on medieval epistolography holds that the material context of preservation matters: we should not extract these letters from their context and reduce them to individual “documents.” Thus, before diving into any one of those 564 letters, how—in what form—did these epistles of Theodore Studites survive?

The great majority are best preserved in collections or anthologies. The largest of which—the 15th-century manuscript *Parisinus Coislinianus 94*—contains 543 unique letters.¹⁴⁷ But their original form was not in such an anthology. According to the *Vita* of Theodore Studites we can assert that in the monastery of St. John in Stoudios there was a collection of his letters in five books.¹⁴⁸ According to the authority of George Fatouros, we can furthermore assert that Theodore had copies made of each letter he wrote before he sent it; Fatouros calls this collection—the sender’s archive of the letters—the *Copybook*. The no-longer-extant five codices in question at St. John in Stoudios had been made by recopying together this loose *Copybook*. Fatouros calls this recopying the *Archetype* of the letter corpus. Granting this—and assuming (which is likely) that the original *Copybook* had collected the letters in

144 Jason Adashinskaya et al., “English Translation of the Letters of Theodore the Stoudite to Eirene the Patrician,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 21 (2015), 162–76; Alexander Riehle, “Theodore the Stoudite and His Letters to Eirene the Patrician: An Introductory Essay,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 21 (2015), 154–61.

145 Anna M. Silvas, “Kassia the Nun c.810–c.865: An Appreciation,” in Lynda Garland (ed.), *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200* (Aldershot: 2006), 17–39, 19.

146 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 44.

147 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 52.

148 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43. Citing: *Vita* B 24 (264d): “αἱ δ’ ἔτι τῶν ἐπιστολῶν αὐτοῦ βίβλοι πέντε μὲν ἕως τοῦ παρόντος σωζονται παρ’ ἡμῖν.”

essentially the order in which they were written—the order of letters in the five-codex *Archetype* would have been a roughly chronological order.¹⁴⁹

Sometime after the death of Theodore Studites, his successors created an *Anthology* out of less than half of the letters in the *Archetype*. This “original” *Anthology*—now lost—dominates the tradition of preserving the letters. For our purposes it is essential to understand where it stands in relationship to the original epistles. Though some later manuscript anthologies consulted a version of the *Archetype* and so preserved letters that were not included in the original *Anthology*, in the end all surviving manuscripts essentially stem from that first anthologizing process undertaken by the 9th-century Studites. When we study the letters of Theodore, we cannot “return” to the original corpus, the *Archetype*. Instead, we can only seek to recover a sense of what it might mean to read Theodore’s epistles as anthologized by his successors and disciples. This is a meaningful historical moment to return to but is not the actual moment we might desire most. Nevertheless, it is a fate we should accept.

Thirty-six manuscripts bear witness to at least one of Theodore’s letters. However, only seven of these codices are devoted to preserving either the letters as distinct texts or as a significant part of the works of Theodore Studites. Together these seven manuscripts contain nearly every preserved letter, and as anthologies in their own right, their transmission and reception can testify to the *Anthology* created just after the death of Theodore.¹⁵⁰ The other twenty-nine manuscripts must be studied under a different paradigm, as they preserve small numbers of epistles for different purposes, such as creating a collection on canon law, or a selection of writings on iconoclasm. The seven anthology manuscripts also had their own governing purposes, none of which was to give us the comprehensive picture of Theodore Studites’ correspondence that we now desire. Two manuscripts are devoted entirely to Theodore’s letters alone: a selection of his letters anthologized as a collection. These are “C” (*Parisinus Coislinianus* 269) with 507 letters and “S” (*Parisinus Coislinianus* 94) with 547 letters. On the other hand, “M” (*Patmiacus* 113) with 237 letters and “V” (*Vaticanus Graecus* 1432) with 266 letters along with the latter’s copy “Z” (*Atheniensis* 298) are collections of Theodore’s works *in general*. In these contexts, the letters are a significant portion of the whole, but only a part. These are different kinds of anthologies. Similarly, “P” (*Parisinus Graecus* 894) with 272 letters anthologizes the works of Theodore (with those of a few others such

149 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 42–43. This is unusual in the ancient world, see Gibson, “On the Nature of Ancient Letter Collections,” 70–71.

150 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43.

as his disciple Naukratios) but has a specific focus on his works against the iconoclasts.

There is an additional great difficulty for the historian wishing to use the letters of Theodore Studites as documentary evidence. Though the (lost) *Archetype* would have preserved the chronological order of Theodore's letters, the anthologies derived from it were not interested in preserving this order. Our knowledge of the chronology of the letters is a hypothesis based on readings of the only two surviving anthology manuscripts which give us information on how to date the letters. The earliest surviving copy of any letters is the 9th-century codex "C" (*Parisinus Coislinianus* 269). This copy depends directly on the original *Anthology* and a section of it preserves the order of the *Archetype*.¹⁵¹ This internal section (fols. 97–286) was copied by Nicholas Studites himself. It seems that Nicholas was overseeing selecting letters from the *Archetype* for the first *Anthology*. For the letters therein numbered 71 through 380, Nicholas copied them himself directly, and in order, from *Archetype* to this *Anthology*.¹⁵² These 309 can thus be taken to be in chronological order. Additionally, the 14th-century manuscript "P" (*Parisinus Graecus* 894) gives us further evidence of the numbering (and thus dating) of the *Archetype*. This codex must have been copied in consultation with not only a copy of an anthology, but also with a copy of the original *Archetype*. It preserves two numbering systems for its 272 letters: a "continuous" numbering system for its own unique selection and ordering of letters, as well as the original chronologically-based numbering system of the *Archetype*.¹⁵³ These 272 epistles can thus be placed in chronological order. For his critical edition, George Fatouros took the entire corpus of the surviving letters of Theodore Studites and, using this information, set what survives into a reconstructed chronology. Fatouros then brought order to the chaos by renumbering these surviving letters in this order. This is a monumental scholarly achievement in the historical-critical method and deserving of sincere praise. But we must also recognize that Fatouros' work is also a reconstruction which masks a historical, material reality: these epistles were transmitted piecemeal, and in anthologies whose order demonstrates their own readings of the epistolary corpus.

What difference does this make? Consider one example. In the manuscript *Coislinianus* 269, the Studite monks Abbot Nicholas and Athanasios made

151 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43.: "... bis auf einen Teil von C, der direkt aus dem ursprünglichen Briefcorpus stammt."

152 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43–46. Note: the rest of the manuscript (fols. 1–96 and 287–457) was copied by the Studite Athanasios.

153 Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 43–44.

the first two epistles in their anthology those numbered 1 and 9 by Fatouros. When these monks made this selection, there were likely many more epistles between these two in the *Archetype*, but there were at least the seven that Fatouros has been able to recover. Nicholas and Athanasios thus *wished* their reader to jump from “Epistle 1” to “Epistle 9.” They skipped (among others) a letter of immense historical and political significance, from Theodore to the Empress Irene. Why?

Though Theodore addressed Epistle 1 to his uncle Plato, he closes by addressing his brother Euthymios, who was imprisoned with Plato at the time. His words are an encouragement to Euthymios to value the suffering he is currently undergoing for the sake of Christ. The next entry that the reader of the anthology *Coislinianus* 269 would read (“Epistle 9”) then presents the reader with a direct contrast: Theodore chides the monk Gelasios for leaving his monastery. Theodore urges him to return and persist in the monastic vocation, which Theodore praises. A reader of Nicholas’ anthology would be immediately confronted with the glory of suffering for Christ, and then chided to persist in that vocation of voluntary suffering for the heavenly glories it brings. This editorial intervention into the order of the *Archetype* obviously serves a rhetorical purpose. It is also a rewriting of the historical-chronological order of Theodore’s epistolary corpus. But it is more as well. This anthology puts its own message into the “mouth” of Theodore’s letters by its new arrangement. It makes the “whole” of the letters it chooses to present about something that no single letter so obviously communicates, and which certainly would be obscured in a truly complete collection. The anthology of Nicholas and Athanasios frames its “Theodore” as a character speaking directly and in a focused manner to concerns of monks in particular: in the case of these two letters, of monks who are struggling with the monastic vocation. When we extract individual letters from manuscript collections, we lose such authorial or rather editorial agendas; we lose the chance to study the whole rhetorical purpose which might have governed the preservation of the epistles, and in doing so deprive ourselves of another source on this past world.

4 Conclusions

An element common to all of the texts discussed in this chapter is the concept of selection.¹⁵⁴ All of these types of text—chronicles, histories, and letters—have

¹⁵⁴ Jason König and Greg Woolf, *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: 2013).

been selected and arranged and then passed on to us through a repetition of that kind of a process. It is essential to keep this in mind when reading all of these “secular” narratives. For instance, consider Rosamond McKitterick’s comment that the *Liber Pontificalis* “engineers the formation of perceptions of Byzantium and the papacy.” It accomplished this as much through the device we are used to looking for—narrative emplotment—as through selection and organization. Again, McKitterick’s comments may serve as a starting point for any of the texts and fragments considered here:

The text makes better sense indeed if it is seen not as a passive record but as active persuasion and a pointed presentation of select incidents, so that the strangely imbalanced and laconic text becomes significant in its very selectiveness.¹⁵⁵

We have argued here that following the traces of this selectiveness, especially as preserved in the surviving manuscripts, may well offer more traces of the curious persons, events, and places of Byzantium than we have yet noticed, and so offer to us as yet unstudied attempts to make sense of that world.

¹⁵⁵ McKitterick, “The Papacy,” 255.

Acta, Treatises, and Hagiography

Richard Price

1 Acta

1.1 *Iconoclast acta*

It is a constant problem in the study of ancient heresy that heretical writings were not preserved in Byzantium. The amount of deliberate destruction has been exaggerated, but such texts were not recopied and the manuscripts rotted away or were lost. No iconoclast treatises survive. The one official iconoclast document that has come down to us intact is the *Horos* (Decree or Definition) of the Council of Hiereia (near Chalcedon) of 754.

Can we be confident that it is intact? It survives only within the *Refutation* of it composed in preparation for the Council of Nicaea of 787 and included in the Acts of this council, since it was read out to the assembled bishops.¹ The *Refutation* goes through the *Horos* sentence by sentence, arguing that each and every one is deserving of condemnation. Is it possible that passages in the *Horos* less open to criticism are simply omitted? But even its uncontentious summary of the earlier ecumenical councils is included and subjected to strained and ineffective protest. This and the lack of any breaks in the argument make it reasonable to conclude that the text is given in its entirety.

How complete and balanced an account does it give of the iconoclast case? The *Horos* claimed to be continuing and confirming the work of the previous great councils in upholding orthodox Christology, for it accused iconophiles of resurrecting heresies that previous councils had condemned – namely Nestorianism and Monophysitism: for if they say that images depict only the manhood of Christ, they are separating it from his Godhead – the heresy of Nestorius –, while if they claim that they depict both the manhood and the Godhead, they are merging the two together – the error attributed to the Monophysites.² The *Refutation* of the *Horos* complains reasonably that it

¹ For a translation of the text, separated from the *Refutation*, see Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), *Translated Texts for Historians* 68, 2 vols with continuous numbering (Liverpool: 2018), 668–84.

² Price, *The Acts*, 672–74.

makes no sense to accuse people of being Nestorian and Monophysite at the same time.

The least contrived part of the *Horos* is the argument that the perfect image of Christ consists of the Eucharist, of his presence in the bread and wine, once these are transformed by the words of consecration. Here we have a real presence of Christ, in obedience to his own explicit injunction and certified by priestly action, while, as the *Horos* insists, without priestly consecration a pictorial image “remains common and worthless.”³ This insistence on the indispensable nature of priestly mediation for access to the divine can be seen as part of a policy of centralization, of a control of the sacred, and of society generally, by the hierarchs of church and state.⁴ But this does not mean that the motive can be reduced to competition over power: it reflected a genuinely religious anxiety over the obscuring by a recrudescence of idolatry of the real and effective channels of grace presented in Scripture and actualized by the rituals of the Church.

When the *Horos* moves on to images of the Theotokos and the saints, it makes the claim that, once images of Christ are excluded, there is “no need” for images of the saints either.⁵ This is an extraordinarily limp and casual claim, especially if we consider that inevitably images of the saints outnumbered those of Christ and were indeed more prominent as the recipients of veneration, through the link with prayers of invocation; for these were primarily addressed to the saints, since it was the patron saint or saints chosen by each of the faithful who were believed to assist them over the mundane trials of life such as disease. A ban on images of the saints was certainly no afterthought, a mere corollary of a sound Christocentric devotion: consider the letter sent by Leo III to Pope Gregory II in 727, which, at least as cited in the *Liber Pontificalis*, banned images “of any saint, martyr or angel” but made no mention of images of Christ.⁶

In this context we should also consider the *Peuseis* (or “Questions”) of Constantine V, issued not long before the *Horos*. These survive in brief citations in the refutation of them in Patriarch Nikephoros’ *Antirrhetici*.⁷ Here too

3 Price, *The Acts*, 675.

4 See Peter Brown, “A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London: 1982), 291–301.

5 Price, *The Acts*, 675.

6 *Liber Pontificalis* 91.17, ed. Duchesne, vol. 1 (Paris: 1886), 404.10–11.

7 The fragments are collected in Georg Ostrogorsky, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (Breslau: 1929), 8–11.

the Christological argument predominates, and here too it is supplemented by the argument that the one true image of Christ is the Eucharist.

In all, the direct evidence for the motivation of the iconoclasm of Leo III and Constantine V is defective. It needs to be supplemented by the indirect evidence of iconophile responses, notably in John of Damascus' three treatises in defence of images, to be discussed below. A matter of dispute between scholars is whether the iconoclast rejection of images of the saints reflected a critical attitude towards the cult of the saints in general. The *Horos* of 754 is explicit that the saints do indeed deserve to be venerated, but does it protest too much?⁸ This is another question where the indirect evidence requires examination. It reminds us that to view the 8th-century crisis in terms simply of iconoclasm is too narrow a focus. There is evidence of a more widespread disenchantment with cultic practice, when the question was put why Christ and the saints had not provided more effective defence for the Christian empire.⁹

The heavy and unhelpful Christological emphasis in the *Horos* of 754 arose from a desire to place the Council of Hieria in the tradition of the earlier ecumenical councils, which had concentrated on Christology. If the veneration of images was to be shown to be not merely superstitious but actually heretical, it had to be shown to involve Christological heresy, and to have been implicitly condemned by the great fathers and the great councils of the 4th and 5th centuries, in their insistence on the true doctrine of the incarnation, of the union without confusion of Godhead and manhood in Christ. In reaction to Hieria's condemning of iconophilism as a Christological heresy, the iconophile Second Council of Nicaea (787) insisted that images of Christ are the perfect expression of the reality of the incarnation: it is because Christ God truly became man that he can be represented in an image. It is because Hieria had condemned images of Christ as heretical that Nicaea insisted that image veneration was not a mere aid to piety but an essential and indispensable part of the faith.

In contrast to the *Horos* of Hieria, the *Horos* of the later iconoclast council of 815 survives only in fragments, as cited by Patriarch Nikephoros in his refutation, written in the 820s.¹⁰ This *Horos*, if indeed

8 Price, *The Acts*, 682.

9 See Dirk Krausmüller, "Contextualizing Constantine V's radical religious policies: the debate about the intercession of the saints and the 'sleep of the soul' in the Chalcedonian and Nestorian churches," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39 (2015), 25–49.

10 These fragments are collected in Paul J. Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and its Definition (*Horos*)," *DOP* 7 (1953), 58–66, with comment at 40–42.

Nikephoros' extracts give a fair picture of it, adds nothing new to that of 754.¹¹

1.2 *Iconophile acta*

Inevitably the case for the victors is far better represented in extant texts. The key official document is the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council – the Second Council of Nicaea (787). Our knowledge of the text, and the various reediting it went through before it reached its final form by the end of the 9th century, has been transformed by the new edition in the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* series by Erich Lamberz.¹² An English translation of his edition, plus a commentary based on his work and that of other contemporary scholarship, is available in the *Translated Texts for Historians* series.¹³ The Acts consist of documents or texts that were read out at the council, plus a selection of speeches and comments by the bishops and monks present. Do not read the text expecting an actual *debate* about images. An attempt to stage the council in Constantinople a year before had foundered on the vocal opposition of some of the bishops; but now at Nicaea it was taken for granted from the very start that iconoclasm was a heresy to be condemned, and bishops who had defended it at the aborted session in Constantinople reappeared at the very first session at Nicaea in the role of repentant heretics. Unanimity was such that this was the first ecumenical council at which no individual needed to be condemned; the artificiality of this façade is clear from the return of iconoclasm within a generation.¹⁴ The Acts are to be read not as a record of the state of opinion among Byzantine bishops, but as a presentation of what was at the time the victorious party line. If the bishops acquiesced without a single dissident, this may reflect less a unanimous enthusiasm for the iconophile

11 Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council," 45 argues that the florilegium issued by the council of 815 advanced a new argument, namely that the true image of a saint was a life that imitated his own, an argument that he calls "immeasurably more profound" than those of 754. But this same argument is implied by the florilegium contained in the *Horos* of 754, in Price, *The Acts*, 677–78.

12 ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3: *Concilium universale Nicaenum Secundum*, ed. Erich Lamberz, 3 parts (Berlin: 2008, 2012, 2016).

13 See n. 1 above.

14 At the same time, the fact that around 340 bishops attended the council (Price, *The Acts*, 689) is evidence of a general acceptance of the new policy, since many could have stayed away. Contrast the attendance at the councils of Constantinople of 680–81 and 869–70, where even at the final session of each only 154 bishops were present in 681 and 104 in 870, because the condemnations of the former Monothelete patriarchs of Constantinople in 681 and of Photios in 870 were unpopular causes.

cause than a feeling that the issue, contrary to the claims made in the conciliar documents, was not worth fighting over.

In the presentation of image veneration two themes predominated – the traditional character of the cult, going back to the “approved” fathers of the patristic golden age (between Nicaea and Chalcedon) and through them (supposedly) to the apostles themselves, and the insult paid to Christ by the iconoclasts, who had dared to claim that his victory over idolatry had proved temporary and ephemeral. The appeal to the church fathers¹⁵ was concerned to show that the two 4th-century fathers who were cited by the iconoclasts as having condemned images – Eusebius of Caesarea and Epiphanius of Salamis – were unrepresentative, and indeed that the iconoclast texts ascribed to the latter were not authentic;¹⁶ although, however, the fathers had generally accepted images, no text was found where a father of the golden patristic age actually expressed approval of their veneration. While the Acts do not propound at any length a theology of images, a number of relevant themes are touched on briefly in the conciliar *Horos*, while the *Refutation* of the *Horos* of 754, which was read out at the council and included in its acts, contains in the midst of monotonous vituperation some genuine words of wisdom, notably on the inevitable limitations in what can be presented in visual form and on the significance of the *name* of Christ or the saint attached to any particular image, as pointing to the fact that image veneration was not a worship of matter but took its meaning from the fact that it went together with prayer addressed by name to the person represented.¹⁷

The parts of the Acts that have received most attention from historians, however, are the documents and citations they contain, notably the *Horos* of 754 and those 7th- and 8th-century texts read out in Session IV which defend the veneration of images, many of which are only found here or in similar iconophile florilegia; their genuineness and reliability has been at the heart of the debate over the date when icon veneration became widespread. The longest citation in the Acts comes from a lengthy tract *Against the Jews* by Bishop Leontios of Neapolis (Cyprus), dating from the second quarter of the 7th century. Arguments that the text was either composed or at least heavily

15 See the long patristic florilegium of 787 in Price, *The Acts*, 264–319.

16 The authenticity or otherwise of the iconoclast texts ascribed to Epiphanius is still disputed. But his lament that his iconoclast arguments had gone unheeded (Price, *The Acts*, 498 with n. 332) is manifestly not an iconoclast forgery and is evidence of their authenticity.

17 For discussion of the themes developed or at least referred to in the *Refutation* and the *Horos* see Price, *The Acts*, 433–38 and 548–54.

interpolated in the mid-8th century ignore the extent to which the text combines a defence of images with that of crosses and relics, which were not attacked by 8th-century iconoclasts.¹⁸ In any case, the text was repeatedly cited or echoed by later iconophiles. It is valuable as placing the debate in the broader context of doubts about the efficacy of the material channels of grace that surfaced during the crisis of the seventh century, when the normal channels of grace proved singularly ineffective in the context of first Sasanian and then Muslim invasion.

Between the long iconophile florilegium and a preliminary iconophile statement of faith, signed by the bishops, there come in the Acts three letters by Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople generally dated by modern scholars to between the start of Leo III's iconoclast campaign in 726 and Germanos' resignation from office in 730.¹⁹ The letters are notable for two things. First, they develop a moderate iconophilism, stressing the catechetical value of sacred images as teaching us the virtues and their usefulness for the simple faithful who cannot ascend to spiritual contemplation. While a number of themes are taken from Leontios of Neapolis, it is striking that, in contrast to Leontios, Germanos never speaks of the "veneration" (προσκύνησις) of images, as contrasted to the "honour" due to the saints they represent.²⁰ Secondly, the placing of the letters between the patristic florilegium and the declaration of faith in the proceedings of the fourth session of the council give them a special importance, relating to the status of Patriarch Tarasios, the chairman at Nicaea II. For Tarasios is presented in the Acts and in writing after his death as in effect a second Germanos, after an interlude when the patriarchate of Constantinople was occupied by what the Acts call "bogus bishops." An iconoclast bishop,

18 For a summary of the sceptical arguments of Paul Speck, accepted by Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: 2011), 49–50 and an attempt to refute them see Price, *The Acts*, 242–45.

19 *ACO*, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 2, 442–47, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 324–55, with discussion at 249–58. The date of the third of the letters, addressed to Thomas of Klaudiopolis, is contested, since it makes no reference to Germanos' patriarchal office and so could postdate his resignation, and even be as late as the late 740s, when Constantine V addressed the iconoclast issue, as argued in Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: A History*, 104–05 and 186. But the arguments for a late date are not probative: see Price, *The Acts*, 255–56. The natural presumption is that the three letters belong to the same context.

20 See Price, *The Acts*, 254–55. The final section of the third of his letters, as given in the Acts, mentions an "image" set up by "our emperors" (Leo III and Constantine V were joint emperors from 720 to 741) and proceeds to treat miracles worked by images, but this section of the letter is manifestly a late interpolation, which interrupts the sequence of thought and is utterly different from the rest of the letter in theme, competence and style. See Price, 353–55 with nn. 525–30.

Constantine of Nakoleia, who was the main object of Germanos' criticism, became upgraded at Nicaea II to the status of the prime initiator of iconoclasm, in an attempt to shift the blame away from Constantine V and preserve the reputation of the Isaurian dynasty.²¹

The dominant concern in the Acts, both in the florilegia it contains and elsewhere, is over what texts can prove, and this reveals a limitation in its defence of images. Actual extant images, which people of the time could have seen, are seldom referred to, and this is not to be attributed to a supposed destruction of images under iconoclasm: it was the product of a mentality among the educated elite in the church that, however much it claimed to venerate images as an essential complement to the written word, continued to give priority to the latter.

For the state of the debate after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843 there is evidence in a further set of acts – those of the anti-Photian Council of Constantinople of 869–70, recognized as the Eighth Ecumenical Council in the Roman Church, but supplanted in Byzantium by the pro-Photian council of 879–80. The Acts of 869–70 survive in a Greek epitome and, more significantly, in a complete Latin translation made soon after the council by Anastasius Bibliothecarius on the basis of a Greek manuscript that must have been written as soon as the council ended. This makes it a notably fuller and more reliable record than that of Nicaea II and indeed than the acts of any of the preceding ecumenical councils.²²

Photios became patriarch of Constantinople in 858 after the canonically dubious deposition of his predecessor Ignatios. Both he and his emperor Michael III wrote to Pope Nicholas I, seeking approval of Photios' election and claiming there was a need to renew the condemnation of iconoclasm, as is clear from the pope's reply to the emperor, preserved in the Acts of 869–70.²³ It must be suspected that Byzantium was exaggerating the danger of an iconoclast comeback as a way of gaining Roman support for the council and acceptance of Photios as patriarch. At the same time, Photios' father was a genuine confessor who had suffered exile and the confiscation of his wealth in the iconophile cause; the emphasis in Photios' writings on the iconoclast issue,

21 See *ACO*, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 2, 594,16–17, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 420.

22 Until recently the only edition of these Acts was in Mansi, but there is now a critical edition by Claudio Leonardi with useful notes: *Gesta sanctae et universalis octavae synodi quae Constantinopoli congregata est Anastasio Bibliothecario interprete* (Florence: 2012). A translation and commentary by Richard Price and Federico Montinaro for the *Translated Texts for Historians* series will be published in 2022.

23 *Gesta*, ed. Leonardi, 116–19.

which has puzzled historians since the issue was surely dead, can be explained as an indirect claim that Photios himself, as the son of an iconophile hero, had fully deserved to be made patriarch.²⁴

The political advantage in raising the iconoclast corpse from the grave was not lost on Michael's successor, the new emperor Basil I, who wrote to Rome in 869, reporting a revival of iconoclasm in the East and seeking Roman support in condemning it.²⁵ At the council of 869–70 Theodore Krithinos, former archbishop of Syracuse,²⁶ as the “leader of the iconomach heresy” was pressed to recant and then anathematized when he refused to do so, together with a number of deceased iconoclasts. Two followers of his, one “Nicetas the cleric” (by implication in one of the lower ecclesiastical grades) and the other, Theophilos “a lay notary,” were produced, and did recant;²⁷ this scarcely adds up to the existence of an iconoclast party worthy of the name. The council's Canon 3 renews, and closely echoes, the definition of Nicaea II that sacred images are to receive the same veneration as the book of the gospels and the cross.²⁸ The impression left by this episode is that iconoclasm had not vanished from the scene but was now a minor phenomenon posing no threat, but which gave the emperors and bishops who condemned it an occasion to display their orthodoxy. Condemning errors that had died a death was an easy and uncontentious way of advancing a claim to respect on earth and assistance from heaven.

2 Treatises

No theological treatises survive from the iconoclast party. The major treatises by iconophiles are those by John Damascene (dating to the second quarter of the 8th century), Nikephoros of Constantinople (dating to between 814 and 828), and Theodore the Stoudite (dating to between 815 and 826). I shall also discuss some treatises of unknown authorship and the *Libri Carolini*. Of all these treatises it is those by John Damascene that have been by far and away the most discussed.

24 See Cyril Mango, “The Liquidation of Iconoclasm and the Patriarch Photios,” in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham: 1977), 133–40, at 139–40. Contrast Francis Dvornik, “The Patriarch Photius and Iconoclasm,” *DOP* 7 (1953), 69–97, who argues that iconoclasm at this date was still a power to be reckoned with.

25 This was implied by the Roman legates at the council of 869–70, in *Gesta*, ed. Leonardi, 264.

26 For Theodore see Jean Gouillard, “Deux figures mal connues du second iconoclisme,” *Byzantion* 31 (1961), 371–401, at 387–401.

27 *Gesta*, ed. Leonardi, 263–70.

28 *Gesta*, ed. Leonardi, 311–12. See Price, *The Acts*, 564–65.

2.1 *John Damascene*

It has often been noted that John Damascene's three treatises in defence of images,²⁹ which he himself did not attach numbers to, are three versions, for different readership, of essentially the same exposition, with many passages appearing in all three. This raises the question of their chronology. The first two refer in general terms to imperial iconoclasm and at two points mention Leo III (d. 741) by name.³⁰ One clue has been missed. In the first of his three treatises John states and proceeds to refute an argument made by others to the effect that images of Christ and the Theotokos could be tolerated but not images of the saints.³¹ Since under Constantine V it was images of Christ that were the main objects of iconoclast attack, this has puzzled historians; but it is paralleled in our most reliable piece of evidence for Leo's campaign, which is the letter he wrote in the late 720s to Pope Gregory II (d. 731), as summarized in the contemporary account (already in process of compilation before Gregory's death) in the *Liber Pontificalis*: "The emperor had decreed that no image of any saint, martyr or angel should be kept, as he declared them all accursed."³² It is true that other parts of John's treatise defend images of Christ in particular; we may conclude that the scope of Leo's campaign was still fluctuating and ill-defined. If this suggests a date around 726 for the first treatise, the second refers to the fall of Patriarch Germanos in 730 as a recent event.³³ In contrast the third treatise gives no indication of an immediate context; but its close relationship to the other two suggests a date not significantly later.

More important, however, than the chronology is the evidence these treatises give for the existence and character of imperial propaganda in defence of

29 *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3, ed. Bonifatius Kotter (Berlin: 1975). Translated as *John of Damascus, Three Treatises on the Divine Images* by Andrew Louth (Crestwood NY: 2003).

30 *Imag.* 1.1 and 66 (Kotter, 65–6 and 166–7) refer to an iconoclast emperor, while *Imag.* 2.16.65 and 18.31 (Kotter 113 and 117) name Leo as the culprit. For the date of these two treatises see Bernard Flusin, 'I "Discorsi contro i detrattori delle immagini" di Giovanni di Damasco et l'esordio del primo iconoclasmo,' in S. Chialà, L. Cremaschi, and V. Kontouma (eds.), *Giovanni di Damasco. Un padre al sorgere dell'Islam* (Bose: 2006), 53–86, at 55–61. The sceptical arguments of Dietrich Stein, *Der Beginn des Byzantinischen Bilderstreits und seine Entwicklung bis in die 40er Jahre des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: 1980), 204–10 tell less against the generally accepted chronology than the presumption that John was responding to an iconoclast edict issued by Leo.

31 *Imag.* 1.19, ed. Kotter, 94.

32 *Liber Pontificalis* (91.17, ed. Duchesne, vol. 1, 404, 9–11). Contrast the statement that Leo explicitly attacked images of Christ at 91.23, based, however, on mere rumours circulating from Constantinople.

33 *Imag.* 2.12, ed. Kotter, 103, 27–29.

iconoclasm. John's arguments on behalf of images have an unmistakably apologetic character, and reflect knowledge of a public campaign of denigration of images: he counters arguments appealing to the prohibition of the making of images in the Decalogue, to the impossibility of a visual representation of the divine, to the lack of support for image veneration in either the New Testament or the Church Fathers, and to the impropriety of worshipping anything material.³⁴ Writing in Palestine at such a distance from Constantinople, John must have been responding to a text. The *Short History* of the later Patriarch Nikephoros, dating to the 770s, states that Leo "attempted to teach the people his own doctrine."³⁵ This suggests that he sponsored and circulated a text (or texts) expounding his position. It may be suggested that it was to such a text that John was responding.³⁶ This indirect evidence for iconoclast propaganda and the arguments it used is important, in view of the extreme sparsity of extant iconoclast literature.

John's treatises are also of particular significance for the historian in that they raise the question, that rumbled on throughout Byzantine history, of the proper role of the emperor in church affairs.³⁷ Maximus the Confessor had adopted an extreme line towards the so-called Monothelete emperors of the 7th century – whose "heresy" (as he called it) consisted, in fact, not in adopting Monotheletism but in failing to condemn it. He insisted that it was for priests and not for emperors to investigate and define the faith.³⁸ This argument was picked up and repeated by John Damascene, who wrote, "We submit to you, O emperor, in the matters of this life, taxes, tribute, commercial dues, in which our affairs are in your hands, but for the state of the church we have pastors who speak to us the word and have issued the church's canon law."³⁹ This theme recurs in an iconophile pamphlet, dating to the first years of the 9th century (or thereabouts), which takes the fictitious form of two letters from Pope Gregory II (d. 731) to the Emperor Leo III.⁴⁰ Gregory is made to pick up

34 *Imag.* 1.2–4, 16, 23 (Kotter, 66–68 with 75–78, 89–92, 111–12).

35 Nikephoros, *Short History* (*Breviarium historicum*) 60, trans. Cyril Mango (Washington DC: 1990), 128.

36 So Hans Georg Thümmel, "Der byzantinische Bilderstreit bis zum Konzil von Hieria," *Annuarium Historiae Conciliorum* 34 (2002), 16–56, at 24. Flusin, "I Discorsi," 71 points to John's argument against a text cited from Epiphanius (*Imag.* 1.25, Kotter, 116–17) as suggesting that the emperor Leo had cited this text.

37 See Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: 2003).

38 *Relatio motionis* 4, in Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions: Documents from Exile* (Oxford: 2002), 49–73, 56.

39 *Imag.* 2.12, ed. Kotter, 104, 38–43.

40 See Jean Gouillard, "Aux origines de l'iconoclisme: Le témoignage de Grégoire II?," *Travaux et Mémoires* 3 (1968), 243–307, for both the text of the letters and a full introduction.

Maximus' assertion that it was an error to regard the emperor as God's image and representative, and to allow him to take part in the definition of doctrine. Not that the forger of the Gregory letters was as bold as Maximus himself: he modifies the boldness of his position by adding that he is denying authority in church affairs not to orthodox but only to heretical emperors, and exhorts Leo III to "become a high priest and emperor" by switching to orthodoxy. But even in Maximus and John Damascene the real objection had been not to imperial involvement in church affairs but to the imperial sponsorship of heresy; no one accused emperors of interfering when they defended orthodoxy.

2.2 *The Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*

As an appendage to a discussion of John Damascene, mention may be made of a short treatise that is attributed to him in most of the manuscripts – the *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*.⁴¹

This text is composite and was enlarged in stages. It is possible that the original nucleus, as Marie-France Auzépy has proposed, was a synodical letter sent to Leo III by the patriarch of Jerusalem in 730. After this came a text of intermediate length, that is extant but not easily available. The fullest and final version can be found in Migne.⁴²

This final version consists for the most part of a defence of image veneration, leading on to a direct attack on the Council of Hiereia as a bogus ecumenical council, since neither Rome nor the oriental patriarchates were represented at it. The defence of image veneration is well conducted, and not unworthy of John Damascene, though the fact that manuscripts of the shorter and older version of the text very rarely give John Damascene as the author tells against ascribing either version to him. There are some parallels with the *Nouthesia gerontos* discussed below; earlier views took the *Adversus Constantinum* to be the borrower, but only because the *Nouthesia* was assigned too early a date (for which see below). More significant are the notable parallels in expression, as well as in ideas, with the Acts of Nicaea II.⁴³ Yet the argument in the text (332B) that the Council of Hiereia contradicted "the first till the sixth" ecumenical councils, without any mention of Nicaea II, implies a date before this

41 The nickname *Caballinus* means "mad on horses" or "horse shit."

42 Marie-France Auzépy, "L'Adversus Constantinum Caballinum et Jean de Jérusalem," *Byzantoslavica* 56 (1995), 323–38. Migne, *PG* 95: 309–44. For further bibliography see Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca 680–850), The Sources: An Annotated Survey* (Aldershot: 2001), 250–51.

43 Set out in Auzépy, "L'Adversus Constantinum," 334–35.

council.⁴⁴ This suggests that this treatise was written by someone involved in the preparations for Nicaea II (much of the material contained in its Acts will have been drafted in advance), that is, someone in the circle of Patriarch Tarasios. One problem with this is that it says, “If you do not wish to venerate them (images), no one is compelling you, but don’t dishonour them” (PG 95: 324A), when the *Horos* of 787, in contrast, insists on their veneration⁴⁵ But it is perfectly possible that this more intransigent line became mandatory only at the council.⁴⁶

A more serious problem lies in the savage attack on Constantine V (hitherto referred to in this treatise only rarely and in passing) that fills most of its final pages (337A–341D); yet the name of this emperor remained protected until Eirene’s deposition and the end of the Isaurian dynasty in 802, which is why the Acts of 787 make no mention of him. This attack concentrates on two charges: the unsavoury fiction that during his baptism the infant Constantine had defecated in the font (whence the opprobrious nickname of *Copronymus* – “named after dung”) and a claim that he had publicly condemned the cult of the saints. The latter is improbable: the *Horos* of Hiereia insists on their cult,⁴⁷ and even though there were doubts in the 7th and 8th centuries over this cult (which had singularly failed to protect the empire and cities from disaster and near extinction), it is unlikely that Constantine would have openly condemned it. But once the Isaurian dynasty had come to an end, it was opportune, on the basis of his condemnation of images of the Virgin and the saints, to claim that he had rejected their cult. We find this already in the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, written in either 807 or 809.⁴⁸ This final section of the *Adversus Constantinum* is unlikely to belong to an earlier period; it follows that it was an addition to

44 One sentence in the text – PG 95: 332C (“Which council should we follow, a renowned and universal one or this headless one?”) – could be read as referring to Nicaea II, but the reference need not be to a specific orthodox council.

45 ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 3, 826, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 564–65.

46 Note too the criticism of “the bishops of this generation” for moneymaking, luxurious living, and neglect of their pastoral responsibility (329D–332A), a criticism that an iconophile would scarcely have made *after* the bishops had condemned iconoclasm.

47 ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 3, 772, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 682.

48 Stephen the Deacon, *Life of Stephen*, 127. For this work and its date see below. It contains parallels with the *Adversus Constantinum*, though more in ideas than in actual wording; these are set out in Marie-France Auzépy, *L’hagiographie et l’iconoclisme byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d’Étienne le Jeune* (Aldershot: 1999), 123–26. Auzépy argues from these that Stephen knew and used the long version of *Adversus Constantinum*. Note too the story about Leo III as “Conon” (336C), paralleled in Theophanes, *Chronicle* 407, trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford: 1997), 564, an exactly contemporary work.

the text, later in date than the section attacking Hiereia, which (as we have seen) predates Nicaea II. It has been argued that the text underwent further alterations after the Triumph of Orthodoxy, but it is best read as the expression of orthodoxy partly in the early years (784–87) and partly in the final phase (802–06) of Tarasios' patriarchate.⁴⁹

2.3 *Patriarch Nikephoros*

As with both the treatises of John Damascene and the *Adversus Constantinum*, it is the attitude towards imperial involvement that is of most interest to the historian in the substantial texts penned by the deposed Patriarch Nikephoros in the early years of the Second Iconoclasm.⁵⁰ His theology of image veneration makes no advance on John Damascene's, but he is more explicit as to what he is rebutting, which are texts too late for John to have known. The first two of his three *Antirrhetici*⁵¹ (written between 818 and 820) are directed against the *Peuseis* of Constantine V, a text that anticipated the main arguments advanced in the *Horos* of the iconoclast council of 754 and is to be dated shortly before it. Why did Nikephoros give priority to refuting the *Peuseis*? Doubtless because they were written by Constantine himself, or at least in his name, and not by a council. He avoids the name Constantine and refers to him consistently as "Mammon," with reference to Mt 6:24, "You cannot serve God and Mammon." The beginning of the work testifies to Constantine's reputation at the time of writing, saying of the iconoclasts, "These wretches have accepted the heresy of Mammon, his canon and strictness of doctrine ... They accord him honours equal to the Godhead, like pagans. Insanely adopting his beliefs and opinions, they embrace and cherish them as their own."⁵² It was not necessary to name Constantine for him to be immediately recognizable as the object of attack. This implies that iconoclasm was still identified with him, and that a major argument continued to be his success as an emperor, particularly in comparison to the devastating military defeats of the first period of iconophile restoration.

49 That the text attained its final form in the second half of the 9th century "at the earliest" was argued by Paul Speck, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen* (Bonn 1990), 321–440, at 438, followed by Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The Sources*, 250–51.

50 For a survey of these works see Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: 1958), 162–88.

51 For this work we are still dependent on the text in *PG* 100: 205–533, but Marie-José Mondzain-Baudinet in the preface to her French translation (Nicéphore, *Discours contre les iconoclastes*, Paris: 1989, 8) reports that an examination of the best manuscripts shows that a new edition is not called for.

52 *PG* 100: 208C and 209A.

In the *Third Antirrheticus* Nikephoros directly assails positive memories of Constantine's reign (cc. 64–83). He admits that it had been a period of material wellbeing, but insists that this is worthless in comparison with true piety, and claims that Constantine had launched a persecution of the church with the help of gangs of swineherds and the lowest of the low.⁵³ Unable to deny that Constantine's reign had outshone that of his successors, he falls back on lauding the pious emperors from Constantine the Great till Justinian, implicitly acknowledging that piety and success go together. The weakness of his argumentation helps explain the continuing strength of iconoclasm.

The longest of Nikephoros' anti-iconoclast works was the last of them, his *Refutation and Rebuttal of the Conciliar Horos (Decree) of 815*, dating to between 820 and his death in 828.⁵⁴ Unlike the *Refutation of the Horos of Hierieia* (754) preserved in the Acts of Nicaea II, Nikephoros gives us not a complete text of the decree but extracts interspersed with his own verbose rejoinder. The most interesting section of the work for the modern historian is its presentation of the history of the dispute. Against iconoclasts who lauded Constantine V and decried Eirene (who restored image veneration) as a weak-minded woman, Nikephoros insists that the real women were the heretics who succumbed to passion and error (c. 24). Accepting the iconoclast charge that Eirene had weakly succumbed to the influence of the bishops, he turns it to her advantage: she did not dictate to the church, as the iconoclast emperors had done, but respected the competence and authority of the bishops (cc. 30, 33). This reflects the presentation of Nicaea II in its Acts as edited by Patriarch Tarasios in the years that followed Eirene's deposition, an edition that Nikephoros drew upon in his iconophile works; for the prefatory material added by Tarasios in this edition shifts the credit for the restoration of images away from Eirene to himself.

Further on, the discussion proceeds to a refutation of a supposedly apostolic text cited in the *Horos* of 815 that condemned images (c. 82). Against this text appeal is made to the images of Christ that go back to New Testament times – such as the image of himself that Christ sent to Abgar of Edessa and the portraits of Christ and his Mother that St Luke was supposed to have painted. This

53 Nikephoros' charges of extensive persecution of iconophiles here and elsewhere depends on confusing iconoclast measures with the persecution of many monks late in Constantine's reign on grounds that had little or nothing to do with images. See Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, 35–39.

54 Printed for the first time in 1997, in *Nicephori patriarchae Constantinopolitani refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815*, ed. Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, *CCSG* 33 (Turnhout). There is a full summary in Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus*, 242–62.

argument does not impress the critical modern reader, but filled a gap: since iconophiles believed in the authenticity of these images, it was a weakness that almost no reference had been made to them at Nicaea II,⁵⁵ where the concentration on texts that talked of images rather than on images themselves undermined its own claim that the image deserves the same respect as the word. Here in contrast Nikephoros refutes a text by appeal to images. Elsewhere, both Nikephoros and Theodore the Stoudite made the claim that images are not merely equal to texts but in some respects their superior. Nikephoros appealed to the stronger and more immediate impact of images, and claimed that texts are more ambiguous and more liable to misunderstanding than images are; he goes so far in the *Third Antirrheticus* as to claim that images have a status equal not merely to religious literature but to Scripture itself (c. 5).⁵⁶ Theodore the Stoudite argued that sight is primary, in that prophets and apostles saw Christ before they wrote of him.⁵⁷ We are on our way towards the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, with its claim that the apostles gave priority to images, in that they had images made *before* they composed the gospels.

2.4 *Theodore the Stoudite*

The third of the great iconophile theologians of the iconoclast period was Theodore the Stoudite (d. 826), whose most important iconophile writings are his three *Antirrhetici* and his *Letter to Plato*.⁵⁸ If John and Nikephoros were happy to employ any argument that provided a defence of images, without a concern for consistency, the third of the great iconophile theologians, Theodore the Stoudite, rested his whole case on the claim that archetype and image are to receive not (correspondingly) a greater and a lesser veneration but one and the same, the only distinction being that the matter in question is different, since Christ's manhood is soul and flesh, while an image of Christ is wood or mosaic. But what is venerated in an image, as he pointed out, is not the material but the "hypostasis" or person represented. This went beyond pointing to the name that both share (that of Christ or a saint): Theodore claimed that there was an identity of "likeness" (ὁμοίωσις).⁵⁹ Icons were generally supposed

55 The Acts of Nicaea II refer to the image of Edessa, but not to St Luke's supposed portrait of the Virgin. That the latter was already part of iconophile propaganda is shown by its mention in the central section of the *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum* (PG 95: 321C).

56 PG 100: 381C-384B.

57 Theodore the Stoudite, *Antirrheticus* 3.1.2, PG 99: 392A.

58 PG 99: 328-436 and 500-505, trans. Thomas Cattoi in Theodore the Stoudite, *Writings on Iconoclasm* (New York: 2014), 45-119 and 135-39.

59 *Letter to Plato*, PG 99: 501A.

to reproduce the actual facial features of the one represented, which is why there are numerous stories in hagiography of a saint appearing in a dream and being recognized because of his likeness to his icons. But it is obvious that an essential distinction is here being ignored.

But the most serious difficulty that Theodore encountered was that, if indeed images of Christ are to receive the same degree of veneration as Christ himself, as he repeatedly insists, then they ought to receive the same worship (λατρεία) as God himself – a deduction that Theodore shies away from making, but inevitably implies.⁶⁰ His insistence that images, in contrast to their prototypes, receive only a “relative” veneration, provides no solution, since “relative” in this context means not lesser but arising from the relation (one of personal as contrasted to material identity) between image and archetype.⁶¹ Commentators have put the blame on the influence of an Aristotelianism that excluded the subtle differences of degree between source and derivative, between that which is shared and that which shares, that were made in Platonism.⁶² A simpler explanation lies in standard iconophile piety, in which images were indeed venerated as if Christ or the saint was truly present in the image that represented him. Theodore’s stress on the dignity of an image depending purely on the rank of the person represented made it easy for him, however, to distinguish between the fullness of worship to be paid to both Christ and images of Christ on the one hand and the veneration of honor to be paid to the saints and their images on the other.

Theodore’s straightforwardness and consistency contrast with the more *ad hoc* argumentation in John Damascene and Nikephoros, who are happy to leap at any argument that serves their turn. Equally striking is the total absence in Theodore of the political dimension prominent in both the other two – the relation between the church and the emperor; he writes as if the problem was a purely theological one, where the answer lay in intellectual clarity.

60 See Price, *The Acts* (n. 1 above), 44–49. The notion of two distinct venerations – one of an image and one of the person represented in the image – was already attacked in the Acts of Nicaea II, e.g. at ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 2, 400, 8–23, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 313–14.

61 Hans Georg Thümmel, *Bilderlehre und Bilderstreit: Arbeiten zur Auseinandersetzung über die Ikone und ihre Begründung vornehmlich im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg: 1991), 110–14.

62 Thümmel, *Bilderlehre*, 47–51.

2.5 *Popular Treatises*

It is time to proceed to a very different category of iconophile treatises, at a notably lower level of theological sophistication, and dating in all probability to the period after the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843.

2.6 *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs*

A work that may also be labelled a treatise is the self-styled letter of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem to the Emperor Theophilos.⁶³ The first paragraph of the text gives the names of the three patriarchs (possibly correctly) and states that the letter was the fruit of a synod held in Jerusalem in 836 with 185 bishops and more than a thousand monks. So large a gathering under Muslim rule is dismissed by historians today as incredible. There follows the letter's formal address to the emperor, without the patriarchs being specified by name (which is suspicious) and with reference again to the presence of other bishops (unnumbered). Though some scholars think that the patriarchs could indeed have sent the letter, the probability is that it should be classified as a pseudepigraphal treatise, to be dated to the last half of the ninth century, even if its dramatic date is during the Second Iconoclasm. Its interest lies in its testimony to iconophile arguments of a less sophisticated and more popular kind than those in the treatises discussed above. Themes already current in the Acts of 787 recur, such as the importance of the name for relating an image to its prototype and the iconoclasts' shocking denial of the fullness of Christ's victory over idolatry, but new ones are added.⁶⁴

Most notable is the stress on an historical argument – the apostolic origins of sacred images. The letter asserts that the apostles themselves “decorated holy church with painted representations and mosaic tesserae *before* the writing of the God-given gospels.”⁶⁵ Moreover, they bequeathed to the church a precise description of Christ for later artists to follow.⁶⁶ It proceeds to list images that were set up by the apostles, including paintings of the various scenes of Christ's

63 The text is in Joseph A. Munitiz et al., *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilos and Related Texts* (Camberley 1997). For a discussion of its authenticity and compilation see Julian Chrysostomides, on pp. xvii–xxxviii of this book, and Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The Sources* (n. 45 above), 279–80.

64 See Christopher Walter in the Munitiz edition of the *Letter*, pp. lxxii–lxxviii for a summary of the theological themes in the letter, which show knowledge of the arguments advanced in the Acts of Nicaea II.

65 *Letter* 6.a, ed. Munitiz and others, 25, 14–16.

66 *Letter* 7.d, p. 31, 11–20. The description attributes curly hair to Christ, as on the coins of the second reign of Justinian II (705–11), in contrast to the tradition, certainly dominant by the ninth century, of representing him with long, flowing hair, as on coins of Justinian's first reign (685–95).

life, with a repeated insistence that these predated the gospels.⁶⁷ Mention is also made of the supposed portrait of the Theotokos by St Luke, “as a legacy as in a mirror for subsequent generations.”⁶⁸ Nicaea II had thought it adequate to show that the fathers of the golden age, from Nicaea I to Chalcedon, had approved of images; once that was demonstrated by appropriate citation, it could be asserted with confidence that images went even further back. The proceedings at the actual council go no further than saying that sacred images were “an ancient tradition”, “handed down from old”,⁶⁹ letters sent out by the council at its dissolution had stated less ambiguously that sacred images went back to the very beginning of the church.⁷⁰ It was axiomatic that whatever was to be found in the consensus of the fathers went back to the apostles. But the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs* shows an awareness that this was not enough. The aim must have been less to convince iconoclasts (who would have mocked the manifestly fictitious claims advanced in the *Letter*) than to satisfy popular piety, which required a more vivid and precise assertion of the apostolic origin of images.

2.7 *The Nouthesia Gerontos*

The *Nouthesia gerontos peri tôn hagiôn eikonôn* (or *Exhortation of an elder concerning the holy images*) is a treatise whose author calls himself “Theosebes,” manifestly a *nom de plume*. He claims to have been a disciple and collaborator of an “elder” (γέρων) called George who conducted a public dispute with an iconoclast bishop at the time of the anti-iconoclast campaign of Constantine V.⁷¹ The date of the work is disputed, with estimates varying from the 740s to the 9th or even 10th century.⁷²

The work falls into three parts, of unequal length. Part 1 (lines 1–100 in the most recent edition) is a speech lamenting a great trial and tribulation,

67 *Letter* 6.f, p. 27, 3–25.

68 *Letter* 7.5, p. 39, 5–10.

69 ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 2, 590, 7, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 418.

70 ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 3, 862, 15–24 and 872, 10–15, trans. Price, *The Acts*, 582–83 and 588.

71 The text is in Andreas Mitsides, ‘Η παρουσία τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου εἰς τὸν ἀγῶνα ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶν εἰκόνων. Γεώργιος ὁ Κύπριος καὶ Κωνσταντῖνος Κωνσταντῖας (Leukosia: 1989), 153–92. Mitsides’ long introduction to the text is primarily devoted to iconophilism in Cyprus and assumes too readily the historicity of the text and the identity of the elder with George of Cyprus, anathematized at the Council of Hiereia (754).

72 Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V*, CSCO 384, Subsidia 52 (Louvain: 1977), 36 concludes his discussion of the work by dating it to the reign of Leo III (717–41). In contrast, Speck, *Ich bin’s nicht*, 571–77, advances a 9th- or even 10th-century date for its composition.

undefined, that is about to descend on the church and expressing faith in the saving power of Christ. This is placed in the mouth of “George by name, seated on the Mount of Olives on Tauros of Cilicia in the reign of the emperors Leo and Constantine” (lines 1–2), which must mean their joint reign before 741; however, the text betrays knowledge of Constantine’s persecution of monks in the latter part of his reign.⁷³ There follows Part 2 (lines 101–820), by far the longest part of the text, which purports to record a debate between George (referred to most of the time simply as “the elder”) and one Bishop Kosmas (no see is given) at a “synod” summoned by the latter, attended by a “congregation” (λαὸς) which at one point intervenes on George’s side (430–36). The date is said to be after the death of Leo III and in the period of Constantine V’s iconoclast campaign (101–103), after his issuing of orders condemning images (112–17, 618–28); this should mean *after* the Council of Hieria, but no reference is made to the latter, even by Kosmas. This is followed by Part 3 (821–1089), in the form of a long oration by the elder, which continues the themes developed in the second part and concludes with an account of how the debate was written up by Theosebes after the subsequent arrest, and permanent separation, of George and himself, and after Theosebes’ escape and flight to Syria. Even if this account were true, it would make us sceptical of the reliability of the account of the original debate between George and Kosmas.

The iconoclast case that is presented by Kosmas consists of little more than citation of Old Testament texts condemning idolatry, an appeal to the silence about images in the New Testament, and insistence on the authority of the emperor. In all this, no use is made of the arguments in Constantine’s *Peuseis* or the *Horos* of Hieria. In response, the elder appeals to the illogicality of rejecting images while venerating the cross, the gospels and sacred vessels (160–62, 380–83) and insists repeatedly that the biblical passages simply condemn images of pagan deities, while an image of Christ or the Mother of God cannot possibly be called an idol. He fails, however, to develop a theological argument (such as we find in John Damascene) from the incarnation to the appropriateness of material images. He appeals to actual Christian images of unique holiness, such as those not made by hands, notably the image of Edessa (529–45), and to icons painted or approved not only by St Luke, but, in an ever expanding catalogue, by Saints Peter, Paul, Thomas, and the apostles generally (603–04, 713–15, 872–77). Meanwhile, Luke’s own contribution is extended to include paintings of scene after scene from his Gospel and from Acts (768–818), the paintings corresponding exactly to the scriptural narration

73 As pointed out by Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 25–26.

and serving the same purpose.⁷⁴ The claim is also made, with no justification at all until we come to the Quinisext Council of 691/2, that every one of the ecumenical councils had approved the making of images (953–81).

All this is on a notably unsophisticated level. Does this mean that this text is older than the full development of the debate? And does the lack of any reference to the Council of Hiereia also imply a date prior to 754?⁷⁵ But all suggestions that the text is prior to Hiereia or at least prior to Nicaea II⁷⁶ are to be brushed aside in view of a simple fact. The *Nouthesia* includes an iconophile florilegium (889–999), of which every item save one (from Dionysios the Areopagite) is taken (with abbreviation) from the Acts of Nicaea II.⁷⁷ Particularly indicative of dependence on these acts is the citation (earlier on in the work) of a passage condemning Severos of Antioch for desecrating sacred vessels (748–55). This also is taken from the Acts of Nicaea II, where the passage is attributed to “the holy council convened in this city against Severos the heretic.”⁷⁸ This refers to the Synod of Constantinople of 518, but is misunderstood by the *Nouthesia* to refer to the “Fifth Ecumenical Council” of 553. In any case, the arguments deployed by the *Nouthesia* in defence of images, notably the amount of space devoted to legendary early images and the recourse to fiction, do not point to the period before Hiereia but to a considerably later period, that of the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, discussed above.⁷⁹ It follows that the debate that the *Nouthesia* purports to record is a literary invention.⁸⁰ It

74 Cf. the similar claim in the *Letter of the Three Patriarchs*, 6.f, p. 27. Cf. also *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, PG 95: 316BC, which likewise brings out the work of the painter as paralleling that of Luke the Evangelist, without, however, identifying the two. Their identification in the *Nouthesia* doubtless arose from the fact that Luke himself was reputed to be a painter.

75 This is the position of Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 36: “The work still moves in the orbit of the relatively undeveloped iconoclastic thought of Leo’s reign.” He therefore dates it prior to the *Peuseis* of Constantine V, that is, to before 750. But he admits (p. 25) that Constantine did not initiate actual measures against images before the Council of Hiereia (754), while the *Nouthesia* refers to these measures.

76 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The Sources*, 251, describe the text as “probably a composite work compiled partly before 754 and partly thereafter (but before 787).”

77 See the list of parallels in *ACO*, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 3, 1035.

78 *ACO*, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 2, 568, 21–22.

79 The use of the Acts of 787 also points to a date after 843, since before then its circulation in the East appears to have been limited and it was scarcely cited. See Price, *The Acts*, 62–63.

80 Compare the sceptical analysis of the whole text in Speck, *Ich bin’s nicht*, 565–77, who dates it to the 9th or 10th century.

ceases to matter whether its author intended his reader to identify his “George” with the George condemned in the *Horos* of Hiereia.⁸¹

2.8 *The Libri Carolini and the Frankish Contribution*

The lack of any extant treatises by Byzantine iconoclasts makes it all the more desirable that the student of the debate should turn to the contribution made by the Franks, most notably in the *Libri Carolini*, written for Charlemagne by Theodulf of Orleans (as is generally supposed) in the early 790s. Till recently this was widely dismissed as reflecting Frankish incomprehension of Byzantine subtleties, but it has been rehabilitated in more recent scholarship.⁸² The iconoclasts had weakened their case by deploring the making of images, which meant that the patristic texts that referred to images without disapproval could be deployed against them, as also could the approval of images as catechetical aids in two letters of Pope Gregory the Great that were frequently cited in the West. But the Franks rightly centred the debate on whether images can be venerated and pointed out with effect that the patristic passages cited at Nicaea II and by Pope Hadrian I provided no explicit support for this. They mocked the recourse in the iconophile florilegium in the Acts of Nicaea II to apocryphal or anonymous hagiographical texts that had no authority and sometimes expressed gross superstition.

In the original Latin translation of the Acts of Nicaea II, a statement by one of the leading bishops at Nicaea II (Constantine primate of Cyprus) that distinguished the honour paid to images from the worship paid to God was so badly translated in the original Latin version as to invite interpretation as an assertion of the opposite – that images are to receive the same worship as that paid to God. This was pilloried in a canon of the Council of Frankfurt of 794.⁸³ But the *Libri Carolini* show awareness of other passages in the Acts where this distinction is clearly made. The Franks admitted readily that many material objects have rightly been treated with honour – from the Ark of the Covenant and the images of the cherubim in the Temple of Jerusalem to the sacred

81 *ACO*, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 2, 782, 2–4.

82 See Hans Georg Thümmel, “Die fränkische Reaktion auf das 2. Nicaenum 787 in den ‘*Libri Carolini*’,” in Rainer Berndt (ed.), *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794*, 2 vols (Mainz: 1997), vol. 2, 965–80, and Marie-France Auzépy, “Francfort et Nicée II,” in Berndt, *Das Frankfurter Konzil*, vol. 1, 279–300. For a summary of the *Libri Carolini* see Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009), 180–206. For a summary of opposing Roman and Frankish positions on the various facets of the debate see Edward J. Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London: 1930), 235–49.

83 *Concilium Francofurtense*, *MGH, Concilia* 2.1 (Hanover: 1906), 110–71, 165: 26–30.

vessels of Christian cult.⁸⁴ The Byzantine iconophiles constantly appealed to these as evidence of the propriety of venerating images. But the distinction between this respect for holy things and an actual cult addressed to them was expressed with clarity and sobriety by the Frankish scholar Einhart in a treatise dating to 836. Einhart points out that a whole range of physical objects, including churches, crosses, and relics, quite properly receive a reverence that finds expression in such bodily gestures as a bow or prostration, but these are not prayed to. It is God alone to whom we pray for salvation or help in time of need, a prayer that typically is not accompanied by a bodily gesture at all.⁸⁵ But the Greeks not only made gestures before images, but also prayed to them. This is why the Franks after Nicaea II rejected as unreal the distinction made by the Greeks between the “the veneration of honour” they paid to images and “worship” paid to God.

The Franks also pinpointed the exaggerated tones in which the debate was conducted in the East. The iconoclasts had argued that the veneration of images was not merely otiose and superstitious but implied Christological heresy, and the iconophiles retaliated by making the identical claim about the rejection of images, namely that it undermined the doctrine of the incarnation, and that in consequence the veneration of images was essential for orthodoxy. But on a sober view the veneration of images is not one of the fundamental and essential tenets of the Christian religion. To cite the *Libri Carolini*:⁸⁶

Let us grant that it is virtuous and a good act to adore images. But how can this be put on a par with faith? ... The same condemnation cannot be meted out to someone who has offended in other works as to someone who has offended as regards faith, since, while no one can be saved without faith through adoring images, there are innumerable legions in the heavenly fatherland who in union with the heavenly hosts enjoy eternal bliss, through martyrdom or innocence or the solitary life, even though they neither possessed nor adored images.

This balanced attitude towards the veneration of images was occasionally voiced in the vocal Byzantine debate and more often expressed in how people acted. Patriarch Germanos strongly criticized those who deplored the

84 See *Libri Carolini* 2.29, in *Opus Caroli regis contra synodum (Libri Carolini)*, ed. Ann Freeman, *MGH, Concilia* II, Supplementum (Hanover: 1998), 300–02.

85 Einhart, *Quaestio de adoranda cruce*, ed. Ernestus Duemmler, *MGH, Epistulae* v, (Berlin: 1895), 146–49.

86 *Libri Carolini* 3.17, ed. Freeman, 415, 28–416, 24.

presence of images in churches, and resigned his see when Leo III persisted in his iconoclast campaign; but his letters in defence of images, which I discussed above, make no reference to the veneration of images, and he chose a graceful retirement in preference to martyrdom. The ease with which almost the whole Byzantine episcopate swung to the iconophile side at Nicaea II, after decades of accepting imperial iconoclasm, and then accepted the reimposition of iconoclasm in 815, and then again in 843 swung back to iconophilism, testifies to a malleability only explicable on the presumption that they did not consider the issue one of first importance – one where orthodoxy was at stake.

We find a similar malleability in the Frankish reaction to the debate. The *Libri Carolini* were never published, because the Franks had no wish to remain at war with the papacy: they regarded the papal defence of images as an aberration, but not one that discredited the papacy, with which they desired to remain on excellent terms, and whose authority they wished to deploy in their own interests. When in the high Middle Ages the cult of images was adopted north of the Alps, this represented not a change in doctrine but a new style of devotion. In the 16th century Calvinist iconoclasm led Catholic controversialists, notably Cardinal Bellarmine, to rediscover the Acts of Nicaea II. Bellarmine conceded that, if no images existed, nothing would be lost of faith, hope, and charity, but argued that, since they exist, it was contrary to the faith to condemn them. He compared them to one of the slightest texts in Scripture, Paul's Letter to Philemon: if this letter did not exist, the Christian virtues would be unaffected; but since it does exist, it should be treated with veneration.⁸⁷ It is here that lies the difference between the Byzantine or Orthodox and the western or Catholic attitude to images. Popular devotion to them has been as strong in the West (at least until recently) as in Byzantium, but the rhetoric of the iconoclast controversy in the East led to images being accorded a much higher place in the hierarchy of doctrine than in the West.

3 Hagiography⁸⁸

3.1 *The Main Iconophile Lives*

The most important life of a saint produced during the iconophile interlude between the First and Second Iconoclasm (784–815) was the *Life of Stephen the*

87 Bellarmine, *Appendix ad tractatum de cultu imaginum*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Justin Lèvre, vol. 7 (Paris: 1875), 9.

88 For the hagiography of this period see Stephanos Efthymiadis, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, Volume I: Periods and Places* (Farnham: 2011), 95–142. Briefer but more oriented to iconoclasm is Ihor Ševčenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast

Younger written by the patriarchal deacon Stephen probably in 809.⁸⁹ Stephen the Younger was born in Constantinople in 715, but spent most of his life in a hermitage in Bithynia within easy reach of the capital. From around the time of the Council of Hiereia (754) he was a leading figure in the monastic opposition to Constantine v, which led to his martyrdom in 765 (according to the chroniclers) or 767 (according to the *Life*). Theophanes' *Chronicle* gives as the reason for this treatment that he had urged many people to reject imperial service and become monks.⁹⁰ The *Chronicle* proceeds immediately to relate Constantine's humiliation of a number of monks by making them process round the hippodrome of Constantinople with women, and (four days later) his execution, or mutilation and exile, of nineteenth senior dignitaries on a charge of treason. It is implausible to attribute these punishments to a clamp-down (a decade after the Council of Hiereia) on lingering opposition to the emperor's iconoclast policy; and the only plausible explanation for the execution of Stephen the Younger is that he was in close contact with some of these traitorous dignitaries. As for Constantine's anti-monastic policy, this is to be attributed to the accusation that the monastic movement, or rather parts of it, denigrated state service.⁹¹

Yet when we turn to the *Life of Stephen* we find that it attributes the opposition to Constantine by Stephen and his followers, and the persecution they suffered, entirely to their utter rejection of iconoclasm. An episode that illustrates its intensity is that of Stephen, when subjected to harsh imprisonment and offered more kindly treatment by the wife of his gaoler, refusing it on the grounds that it would be a sin to have dealings with heretics – though he relents when the woman turns out to be a secret iconophile (c. 57). The composition of the *Life* a few years before the inauguration of the Second Iconoclasm is to be seen as less a thanksgiving for the victory of iconophilism as a recognition that this victory was insecure. Note that the *Life* refers to Constantinopolitan clergy who were loyal to Constantine v's iconoclasm;⁹² meanwhile Theophanes' *Chronicle* mentions a group of iconoclast monks, led by one Nicholas of Hexakoinion,

Period," in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham: 1977), 113–31. Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The Sources*, 199–232 offer both general comments and a listing with bibliography and some discussion of a large number of *Lives*.

89 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune* (Aldershot: 1997), which contains the text, a French translation, a lengthy introduction and full annotation. See also Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclisme*. For the dating of the work to either 807 or preferably 809 see *La Vie*, 8–9.

90 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 437, trans. Mango and Scott, 604.

91 Auzépy, *La Vie*, 22–39.

92 Auzépy, *La Vie*, c. 38, p. 138, 3–9.

who operated in the suburbs of Constantinople under Nikephoros I (802–11).⁹³ In all of this we find, as in the anti-iconoclast treatises of Patriarch Nikephoros discussed above, that the revered memory of Constantine V remained the strong point in the iconoclast case, and iconophiles devoted great energy to trying to undermine it. The *Life*, which celebrates the heroism and sufferings of other iconophile monks apart from Stephen, may also be accorded a role in the development of the myth that the monastic movement was solidly hostile to iconoclasm and played a major part in its defeat.⁹⁴

The half century that followed the Triumph of Orthodoxy witnessed an exceptional production of hagiography.⁹⁵ This was initiated by Ignatios the Deacon, who penned two substantial *Lives* – those of the two patriarchs of Constantinople, Tarasios and Nikephoros, during the iconophile interlude from 784 to 815.⁹⁶ At the very beginning of his *Life of Nikephoros* Ignatios pretends that he was spurred to write this work by Nikephoros' death in exile in 828. The work ends, however, with the writer wringing his hands over his own conforming to the then dominant iconoclasm, although he insists that in his heart he had remained orthodox; this implies a date of composition after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This *Life* includes a lengthy debate over sacred images between Nikephoros and the emperor Leo V, undoubtedly a literary composition by Ignatios.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, the *Life of Tarasios* certainly postdates the Triumph of Orthodoxy by a few years. Its place in the unfolding of the iconophile rewriting of history is shown most clearly by the chapters that cover his election as patriarch, which are to be compared to the account given in the imperial *sacra* read out at the first session of Nicaea II and in Tarasios' speech on his election, which was added to the Acts of Nicaea II in the edition made by Tarasios between the fall of the Empress Eirene in 802 and his death in 806 and is also preserved in the *Chronicle* of Theophanes (completed in the 810s).⁹⁸ The decision to hold

93 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 488–89 and 496–97, trans. Mango and Scott, 671 and 680.

94 See Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclasm*, 271–88.

95 Stephanos Efthymiadis, *The Life of the Patriarch Tarasios by Ignatios the Deacon* (Aldershot: 1998), 4.

96 For the dates of composition of these *Lives* see Efthymiadis, *The Life of Tarasios*, 46–50. Efthymiadis provides a critical edition and an English translation of the *Life of Tarasios*. Of the *Life of Nikephoros* there is a critical edition in Carl de Boor, *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opuscula historica* (Leipzig: 1880), 139–217, and a translation by Elizabeth A. Fisher in Alice-Mary Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington DC: 1998), 24–142.

97 Trans. Fisher, *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, 79–100.

98 *Life of Tarasios*, cc. 10–17. Price, *The Acts*, 88–90, 105–09. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 458–60, trans. Mango and Scott, 632–33.

an ecumenical council to restore the sacred images is to be attributed to the Empress Eirene, who chose Tarasios as a loyal government servant to be elected as patriarch and to carry out her policy. In the *sacra*, however, the change of policy is first suggested by the resignation of Patriarch Paul in 784, which is attributed to his distress at iconoclasm, and is then demanded by Tarasios as a precondition for his acceptance of the patriarchate. Note too that while the *sacra* records no positive recommendations by Paul, Theophanes attributes to him the first demand for an ecumenical council, while the *Life of Tarasios* goes one better by making him recommend the election of Tarasios as his successor.⁹⁹ The desire to minimize Eirene's own role is manifest: it was an embarrassment that the great iconophile council had been convened by an empress who, as the first female ruler in Byzantium and as responsible for the death of her son Constantine VI, the legitimate ruler, left a dubious memory.

The *Life* needs to be carefully examined to see how it deals with matters where Tarasios excited the strong and public opposition of the monastic party led by the Stoudite monks. Prominent here was his mild treatment of the formerly iconoclast bishops accused of obtaining their sees through simony, of heresy, and of having been consecrated by heretics. In response the *Life* avoids the messy details, but commends Tarasios for his conciliatory, irenic policy: Tarasios, we are told, "preserved the universal church in a state of peace and serene calm" (c. 31); here Ignatios could expect a sympathetic response from many of his readers. Harder to defend was Tarasios' compromising stance during the first phase of the Moechian controversy. Here Ignatios simply changes the facts: he represents Tarasios as uncompromisingly opposed to Constantine VI's second marriage (cc. 43–47).

The Moechian controversy was also problematic for the reputation of Nikephoros, who supported the reinstatement in communion and the priesthood of the priest and hegumen Joseph, who had earlier been deposed for conducting Constantine's second marriage. Here Ignatios' solution was simply to omit this episode altogether from his *Life of Nikephoros*. In its place he mentions the patriarch's condemnation of a governor of the Crimea who was seeking an uncanonical second marriage.¹⁰⁰ But the length and complex Greek of these *Lives* shows that they were written for the well-informed elite and would have been perceived as propaganda for "economy" over "strictness," as part of a longstanding war within the Byzantine church, which reached its

99 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 457, trans. Mango and Scott, 631. *Life of Tarasios*, c. 10.

100 *Life of Nikephoros*, ed. de Boor, 160, trans. Fisher, 67–68.

climax twenty years later in the conflict between the rival patriarchs Ignatios and Photios.

3.2 “Iconoclast” Lives

In contrast to the *Lives* that present heroes of the anti-iconoclastic struggle are a number of *Lives* that have been characterized as iconoclast.¹⁰¹ These do not contain explicit anti-iconodule propaganda; if they had, they would not have survived the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Rather, they display (it is claimed) a number of subtler characteristics that link them to the policies and priorities of the iconoclast emperors. They instantiate the iconoclast claim, prominent in the *Horos* of the Council of Hiereia, that the supreme “image” is not a painted one but a holy life, as a model of the virtues.¹⁰² As regards the virtues depicted, these *Lives* ignore the specifically monastic virtues of withdrawal from the world and bodily austerity, rewarded by the power to work miracles (which are rare in these *Lives*), and concentrate on the active virtues of service to the community, particularly in the support of the poor and destitute. We are reminded of the known characteristics of the rule of Constantine V, notably his insistence on active participation in society and the Christian apostolate; we know that the principal spur in his harassment of many monks was his disapproval of monastic disparagement of social activity and of the supreme value accorded by the monastic movement to the anchoritic life of prayer and contemplation.

A prime exhibit that has been flaunted in this context is the *Life of George of Amastris*, a saint who upon entering the monastic life studied the *Lives* of the saints as “living images” of the good life.¹⁰³ In the description of his episcopate the emphasis is on works of charity and a daily celebration of the Eucharist. In the miracle stories in the *Life* it is the cross, and certainly not images, that is a prime agent of the miraculous. But does this make the work iconoclast? George of Amastris was himself no iconoclast; indeed he was a friend of the Empress Eirene and of the Patriarchs Tarasios and

101 See especially Marie-France Auzépy, “L’analyse littéraire et l’historien: L’exemple des vies de saints iconoclastes,” *Byzantinoslavica* 53 (1992), 57–67; Ševčenko, “Hagiography,” 120–27, and Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The Sources*, 201–02.

102 But note that the strongly iconophile *Life of Euthymios of Sardis*, written by the future Patriarch Methodios, (see n. 122 below) contains a lengthy discussion of images, most of which has nothing to do with material representation (cc. 32–7). The same is true of John Damascene’s discussion of varieties of image in his treatises advocating their veneration (*Imag.* 1. 9–13, ed. Kotter, 83–87). Such a discussion is no evidence of negativity towards material images.

103 For bibliography see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The Sources*, 212–13.

Nikephoros.¹⁰⁴ The ascription of miracles to the cross rather than to images is also to be found in the staunchly iconophile *Life of Ioannikios* (discussed below). The emphasis on works of charity and the Eucharist is natural enough in an account of a pastoral bishop.

Another *Life* claimed to be iconoclast is the *Life of Philaretos*.¹⁰⁵ This work makes no mention of icons and has a single theme – the virtue of almsgiving, a virtue which *Philaretos* exercises to an unsurpassable extent; for example, one lengthy sequence narrates how, on losing all his property save a few farm animals, he gives each one away in turn to someone in even greater need.¹⁰⁶ The question arises as to whether this work is a genuine piece of hagiography or simply an edifying novel.¹⁰⁷ In either case it presents almsgiving as the supreme virtue – for a layman. This accords with wholly traditional Christian ideas, and the *Life* of a layman is not going to talk about renouncing the world or the contemplative life. There is nothing here to associate the work with iconoclasm or with Constantine V's hostility to monasticism.¹⁰⁸

3.3 Other Iconophile Lives

Yes, these supposedly iconoclast *Lives* do not mention icons or images. But do these take centre stage even in the *Lives* of many iconophile saints? A *Life* whose hero is explicitly said to have venerated images is the *Life of Niketas patriarch and eunuch monk*:¹⁰⁹ we hear of a venerable icon of Christ he obtained

104 Ševčenko, "Hagiography," 124. Note also that it has been proposed on stylistic grounds that the anonymous author of this *Life* was the Ignatios who wrote the *Lives* of Tarasios and Nikephoros.

105 M.-H. Fourmy and M. Leroy, "La Vie de S. Philarète," *Byzantion* 9 (1934), 85–170. See also Lennart Rydén, *The Life of Philaretos the Merciful written by his grandson Niketas* (Uppsala: 2002).

106 Fourmy and Leroy, "La Vie," 117–33.

107 Once we realize the dubious historicity of the *Life*, its claim (at 165, 27–28) to have been written in 822 (in order to make it credible that it was written by a grandson of the supposed saint) becomes suspect. The *Life* could easily date to a later period. See Alexander Kazhdan, *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–85)* (Athens: 1999), 290, who places it "at the head of the 'rural hagiography' which flourished in the ninth and tenth centuries."

108 Ševčenko, "Hagiography," 126, notes that it makes no mention of icons even though "it repeatedly mentions various precious objects with which Constantine VI showered Philaretos' children." But even in iconophile *Lives* specific mention of icons (as contrasted to opposition to iconoclasm) is often lacking. Note in addition that the narrative climax of this *Life* is the marriage of one of the saint's granddaughters (Maria of Amnia) to Constantine VI, and the treatment of both him and Eirene contains no element of criticism of them; indeed Eirene is called "Christ-loving" (135, 24–25).

109 Denise Papachryssanthou, "Un confesseur du second iconoclisme: La Vie du patrice Nicéas (†836)," *TM* 3 (1968), 309–51. Niketas died in 836. Ševčenko, "Hagiography," 117, dates his *Life* to the end of the 9th century, while Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium: The*

from Rome, and of the emperor Theophilus ordering him to cease venerating images.¹¹⁰ But this is not prominent in the work as a whole, and images play no part in his posthumous miracles.

A substantial iconophile *Life* dating to soon after the Triumph of Orthodoxy is the *Life of Ioannikios*, a hermit who died in 846, written by the monk Peter of the Agauroi monastery on Mount Olympos.¹¹¹ A date of composition soon after the saint's death is suggested by Peter's referring to Peter of Syllaion, who was deposed at a date between 847 and 853, as still in office. He refers frequently to Eustratios, hegumen of his own monastery, as someone who knew the saint well and subsequently become one of the writer's chief informants. However, these indications of an early date may be fictitious: the *Life*, with its numerous stories of the saint killing dragons and several stories of the saint's ability to become invisible, reads like the product of a longish period during which legendary accretions could replenish a diminishing store of genuine memories.¹¹² The author of the *Life* presents himself and Ioannikios as staunch iconophiles, as was to be expected after the Triumph of Orthodoxy,¹¹³ but he does not present Ioannikios as having played an active role in the resistance to the Second Iconoclasm; the references to his iconophile loyalties are brief and perfunctory. Any religion that worships a transcendent deity needs visible and tangible points of contact on earth to connect his worshippers to the unknown and unknowable. Two points of contact, and only two, are prominent in the *Life*: one is the saint himself and his extraordinary ability to work miracles and foretell the future, and the other is the cross; Ioannikios invariably works his miracles by displaying a cross or making the sign of the cross. In contrast, images or icons are never referred to. Ioannikios' prayers are regularly addressed to "God," meaning the Triune God of the Christian faith, but with only occasional references to the incarnation – and it was, of course, only the incarnation that made images of Christ a possibility. The *Life* contains a few significant references to the saint's veneration for the Theotokos, and a few

Sources, 222, says it "was written probably in the 860s, although an earlier date is possible." The text is incomplete: only the final third is extant.

110 *Life*, cc. 3–4. The statement at c. 20 that he paid a "relative" veneration but not "worship" to images of the saints is concerned to stress his orthodoxy rather than his piety.

111 In *Acta Sanctorum* Nov. 2/1, 332–83 (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca 935). Trans. Denis F. Sullivan, in Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, 243–351.

112 See Kazhdan, *A History*, 329, for some points of detail which likewise suggest a later date for this *Life*.

113 In c. 55 Peter puts into Ioannikios' mouth a lengthy profession of faith, including explicit iconophilism, taken from Patriarch Nikephoros, *Apologeticus pro sacris imaginibus* (PG 100: 580D–592A).

slighter ones to his devotion to other saints; but the piety that shapes the work is that of the cult of holy men as it had developed in the 4th and early 5th centuries, long before images were venerated or relics widely disseminated. The fact that this *Life* survived in the Byzantine tradition is evidence that this was not considered deviant.

This lack of a lively interest in images in *Lives* even of iconophile saints may be further illustrated from the *Life of Peter of Atroa*.¹¹⁴ Peter had died in 837, and the author of his *Life* presents himself as a close disciple. There may well be an element of fiction in this, but certainly the *Life* represents the memory of the saint as it was preserved after his death in his own monastery. The *Life* was clearly composed after the Triumph of Orthodoxy and is concerned to represent Peter as a consistent iconophile. This is not to say that Peter openly defied the iconoclasts: instead we read, for example, how on the initiation of persecution by Leo V Peter induced his monks to disperse and lie low; an easy fiction asserts that he refused to use his miraculous powers (the main theme of the *Life*) to the benefit of supporters of iconoclasm, unless they repented of their heresy.¹¹⁵ Particularly revealing is the appendix to a second version of the *Life* by the same author, narrating his posthumous miracles.¹¹⁶ Virtually all of these involve healings by oil from the lamp by his tomb or (in a few cases) exuding from his tomb, for the benefit of people who visited his place of burial or sometimes invoked the saint at a distance. There is never a mention of any image or icon of the saint.

Why should an iconophile *Life* mention that the saint in question venerated images? Could that not be taken for granted? But a conventional defence of images pointed to their value as a reminder and inspiration for those who could not read: this condescending and limiting recommendation of images had to be corrected by true iconophiles. The *Horos* of the Second Council of Nicaea laid down that images “are to be accorded greeting and the veneration of honour ... in the same way as this is accorded to the figure of the honourable and life-giving cross, to the holy gospels, and to other sacred offerings.”¹¹⁷

114 Vitalien Laurent, *La Vie merveilleuse de saint Pierre d'Atroa*, Subsidia Hagiographica 29 (Brussels: 1956).

115 See cc. 12–13 and 24. The one mention of an actual image in the *Life* is a story of the saint seeing an icon of Christ sweating milk-like drops (c. 14). But the emphasis is not on the icon itself, but on the saint's unique powers of perception. The *Life* includes a laudatory letter that Theodore the Stoudite is supposed to have written in praise of the saint (c. 38); this letter says nothing about his iconophile sympathies.

116 Vitalien Laurent, *La Vita Retractata et les miracles posthumes de saint Pierre d'Atroa*, Subsidia Hagiographica 31 (Brussels: 1958), at 134–71.

117 ACO, ser. 2, vol. 3, pars 3, 826, 12–15.

St Theodore the Stoudite expressed the true iconophile conviction that the veneration of images was incumbent not just on the uneducated but on all Christians.¹¹⁸ We might therefore expect that iconophile *Lives* would mention the saints' veneration of images as a model for all Christians to imitate, and also that among a saint's posthumous miracles would be miracles worked by images of the saint in question. Yet this is not what we find. If we turn to the *Lives* of John Damascene or of the Patriarchs Tarasios and Nikephoros, or a host of lesser iconophile saints, we find emphatic assertion that saints who lived (at least during some of their lives) during the First or Second Iconoclasm had vigorously opposed it; they had to be seen as unflinching opponents of heresy. But the actual veneration of images receives no emphasis, indeed rarely any mention;¹¹⁹ equally exceptional are miracle-stories involving images. It may be noted that the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, discussed above, is an exception in this respect: it narrates a series of miracles worked by prostration before an icon of Christ.¹²⁰ This brings out the contrast between a work with an emphatic iconophile message such as this *Life* and the general run of saints' *Lives*, whose priorities lay elsewhere. Even the *Lives* of Tarasios and Nikephoros were not primarily works of iconophile propaganda.

In all, the hagiography of the period of the iconoclast controversy bears witness to the continuing strength of the traditional motifs and themes of hagiography. The condemnation of heresy, whether iconoclast or on some other topic, receives emphasis; but the actual veneration of images does not. How are we to account for this? A recent major handbook on the history of this period calls it "the Iconoclast Era."¹²¹ But would the Byzantines of the time have recognized this description of their age? Although other evidence needs to be invoked, and the writers of saints' *Lives* were working within a very specific literary tradition, the hagiography of the 8th and 9th centuries may suggest to us that the iconoclast controversy did not maintain a central position in church life throughout this period, and that even by 900 the veneration of images was doubtless a significant but not yet a primary feature of religious practice.

118 Theodore the Stoudite, *epistula* 499, *CFHB*, vol. 31, pars 2, 737–38.

119 In the *Life of Euthymius of Sardis* (in Jean Gouillard, "La Vie d'Euthyme de Sardes [†831]," *TM* 10 (1987), 1–101), written by the great iconophile patriarch Methodios, the saint is said to have boasted to the iconoclast Emperor Leo V, as proof of his devotion to images, that he had venerated the image of Edessa. But, as an image "not made by hands" but (supposedly) by Christ himself, it was a relic rather than an icon.

120 *Life of Stephen the Younger*, cc. 49–51 and 54.

121 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History* (n. 18 above).

Material Culture

Sabine Feist

Byzantine material culture from the Iconoclast era is commonly associated with negative connotations. Such connotations may derive from debates about images – their making, their breaking, and their use – which were at the centre of theological controversies during the Iconoclast era and led to the assumption that images of all kinds were rejected in the period under discussion. The first part of this chapter will reconsider this prejudice. For this purpose, a survey of the key material evidence from the so-called “Iconoclast era” will be undertaken and it will be asked whether or not it was a period without images. Two critical questions will be raised in this context: firstly, were new images produced during this time? Secondly, were existing previous images destroyed in large quantities as the iconophile texts, discussed elsewhere in this volume, repeatedly claim? In order to find an answer to these questions that is as multilayered as possible, the associated survey will pay attention to various media such as silks, manuscripts, icons, ivories, coins, seals, statues, and mosaics. This cross-genre approach is all the more necessary since the material evidence from the Iconoclast era is rather meagre and the period is not without reason also known as the “Dark Ages.”¹

The second part of this chapter will concern another popular prejudice against Byzantine iconoclasm that regards the material culture from the Iconoclast era as incapable of filling the lacuna between late antiquity and the Middle Ages in a satisfying way. On the one hand, the known material evidence from the period under discussion is classified as a caesura with standardized late antique traditions. On the other hand, examples from almost all genres are considered to be not up to the standards of middle and late Byzantine eras; instead, they are only regarded as an unprocessed preliminary stage of subsequent periods. Against this background, the chapter’s second part tries to find out whether there were more connections between late antiquity and the Middle Ages by asking two crucial questions: first, did the period of Byzantine iconoclasm really witness such a rapid decline from late antique standards as it has often been supposed by modern scholarship? Second, did the achievements

1 See for instance Michael Decker, *The Byzantine Dark Ages* (London: 2016).

of the middle Byzantine era really emerge without any predecessors? The most promising sources for finding these missing links between the different eras are the preserved churches from the period under discussion, which – compared to the rather isolated examples from other genres from the Iconoclast era – are relatively numerous. Apart from the quantity of ecclesiastical architecture from the period, most of the key monuments show great promise for a better integration of this era into the development of Byzantine architecture in general, since most of them were not erected *ex novo*. Instead, they were rebuilt while maintaining large parts of their older predecessors. Moreover, the churches continued to be used into the middle and late Byzantine eras. Therefore, the iconoclast phase was only one piece of a puzzle in the churches' history and a sound comparison between the periods promises to reveal both similarities and differences. In addition, at least parts of the pictorial programme of the churches have been preserved, allowing comparison with late antique predecessors and subsequent developments.

Before starting with the chapter's first part, one important issue needs to be mentioned: some of the following examples cannot be dated with certainty to the period under discussion, let alone to a precise date within it. This concerns not only the survey of images during the Iconoclast era but also the survey of the ecclesiastical architecture. Nevertheless, the examples mentioned in this chapter, which may date shortly before or after Byzantine iconoclasm, are integral parts of a development characteristic of the Iconoclast period. For this reason, examples with possibly slightly different dating are also included in the following investigation.

Even a cursory look at various media clarifies that the period under discussion was by no means a time without images and that these were still produced in considerable quantities, both in the periods when venerating religious images was prohibited and when it was condoned. For instance, Byzantium was a major producer of *silk textiles* across the 8th and 9th centuries. While dating the surviving silks is extremely difficult, many have been ascribed to the period.² These silks could be lavishly embroidered with both non-figural and figural imagery, and could depict both secular and religious scenes. While production of the latter might plausibly have only occurred during moments when iconoclasm was not official policy, this is impossible to prove from the surviving examples. Certainly at no point in the period was there an injunction

2 For Byzantine silk in general see Anna Muthesius, *Byzantine Silk Weaving AD 400 to AD 1200* (Vienna: 1997). For silks in the Iconoclast era see Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period (ca. 680–850): The Sources* (Aldershot: 2001), 80–108.

against the creation of non-religious figural imagery, and numerous examples survive of silks depicting, for instance, charioteers and hunters.

Likewise, contemporary *manuscripts* deploy a variety of imagery, employing such minor illustrations as small crosses, leaves, and grapes.³ In addition, there are also full-page and figural images. An impressive example of the latter is an illustrated copy of the *Handy Tables*, usually attributed to the 2nd-century astronomer Ptolemy and now in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (gr. 1291).⁴ Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*, which among other things served to calculate the positions of stars and planets, tells against any categorical distinction between iconoclasts and iconodules and their handling of images, since the manuscript presumably was created in the reign of the iconoclast Emperor Constantine v.⁵ The manuscript was probably written in Constantinople and served primarily as a useful handbook for astronomers and astrologers.⁶ It includes eight representations of all twelve members of the zodiac (fol. 22r–fol. 37v) and also shows several images of personifications such as the four winds (fols. 45v; 46v; 46r; 47v), the moon (fols. 46r; 47r), and day and night (fol. 47r). Folio 47r, also known as the epact table, is of particular interest for the manuscript's usage since the diagram was designed to calculate the date of Easter (Figure 5.1). However, the data contained within it could only be used to calculate Easter for the period between 314 and 541 and not for the time of the manuscript's creation. It can therefore be assumed that this page was copied from an older model and had no practical use for the contemporary reader.⁷ In addition to these illustrations, the manuscript also contains three full-page miniatures. One of them is a solar diagram or so-called sun table (Figure 5.2). Contrary to the epact table, the sun table was probably created at the same time as the Vatican Ptolemy itself, since it provides information that was only valid at the time the manuscript was written.⁸ The solar diagram consists of

3 Minor illustrations can be found in a majuscule copy of Dionysios the Areopagite (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, gr. 437), and in the so-called *Uspenskij Gospel* (Gosudarstvennaya Publičnaya Biblioteka im. Saltykova-Ščedrina, gr. 219). See Leslie Brubaker, "Greek Manuscript Decoration in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries: Rethinking Centre and Periphery," in Giancarlo Prato (ed.), *I manoscritti greci tra riflessione e dibattito* (Florence: 2000), 513–533.

4 Raymond Mercier, *Ptolemy's Handy Tables* (Louvain-la-Neuve: 2011); Benjamin Anderson, *Cosmos and Community in Early Medieval Art* (New Haven: 2017), 114–126; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 37–40. The Vatican Ptolemy is one of four preserved majuscule manuscripts of the *Handy Tables* from the 8th and 9th centuries, but the only one with figural illustrations.

5 David Wright, "The Date of the Vatican Illuminated Handy Tables of Ptolemy and of its Earlier Additions," *BZ* 78 (1985), 355–362, 355–356.

6 For the manuscript's origin and its usage see Anderson, *Cosmos*, 115–117, 126.

7 Anderson, *Cosmos*, 119–121.

8 Anderson, *Cosmos*, 121.

five rings: the outermost shows the twelve members of the zodiac; the second names the twelve months; in the third the personifications of the months are depicted; the fourth ring names the hours; in the fifth ring day and night are illustrated. The central medallion shows Helios in his chariot. The other two full-page miniatures of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables* represent the constellations of the northern and the southern hemispheres (fols. 2v; 4v). Whether these miniatures were included in the manuscript afterwards, as often suggested, remains uncertain.⁹ It is clear, however, that all miniatures of the Vatican Ptolemy show at least two or even three different hands, which appears most evidently in the lunettes depicting all twelve members of the zodiac (fol. 22r–fol. 37v).¹⁰ Even if the hands that worked on the manuscript are stylistically different, their technique was very well developed. This observation is evidence for a high-quality and innovative artisanal production in 8th-century Constantinople.

Another prominent and intensively studied illuminated manuscript, the *Khludov Psalter*, provides a different view on the era.¹¹ The special but not unique feature of the *Psalter*, which is now in the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Cod. 129), is its combination of written Psalms and their accompanying and commenting small-scale images in the broad margins. Psalm 25:5 “I hated the assembly of evil doers, and with the ungodly I cannot sit” on folio 23v, for example, is combined with a depiction of the iconoclast Council of the year 815 (Figure 5.3). In the margin patriarch Nikephoros is holding a circular image of Christ, while below is depicted the assembled Council that reinstated iconoclasm – which Nikephoros refused to attend. Emperor Leo v, who presided over the Council, and the gathering's participants are watching two men who are whitewashing an image of Christ identical to the one Nikephoros is holding.¹² Other folios of the *Khludov Psalter* demonstrate the bridging between Scripture and the theological debates by two illustrations, of which one depicts a biblical scene, one an iconoclastic analogy. Folio 67r surely is the most prominent example of this parallelism (Figure 5.4).¹³ Next to Psalm 68:22 “They gave me also gall for my food, and made me drink vinegar for my thirst” the Crucifixion is illustrated as a typological image from the New Testament, since Christ was

9 Wright, *Ptolemy*, 359–361; Anderson, *Cosmos*, 115.

10 Although there are differences, another hand for the epact and sun tables is unlikely (for differences and similarities see Anderson, *Cosmos*, 121–122).

11 Maria Shchepkina, *Miniatiury Khludovskoi Psaltryi* (Moscow: 1977).

12 According to an iconophile legend that attacked icons bled, the red lines next to the image of Christ on fol. 23v are sometimes interpreted as blood. See, Kathleen Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge: 1992), 32–33, 113–114.

13 The parallel illustrations of the text of the Bible and Byzantine iconoclasm occur also on fols. 35v and 51v.

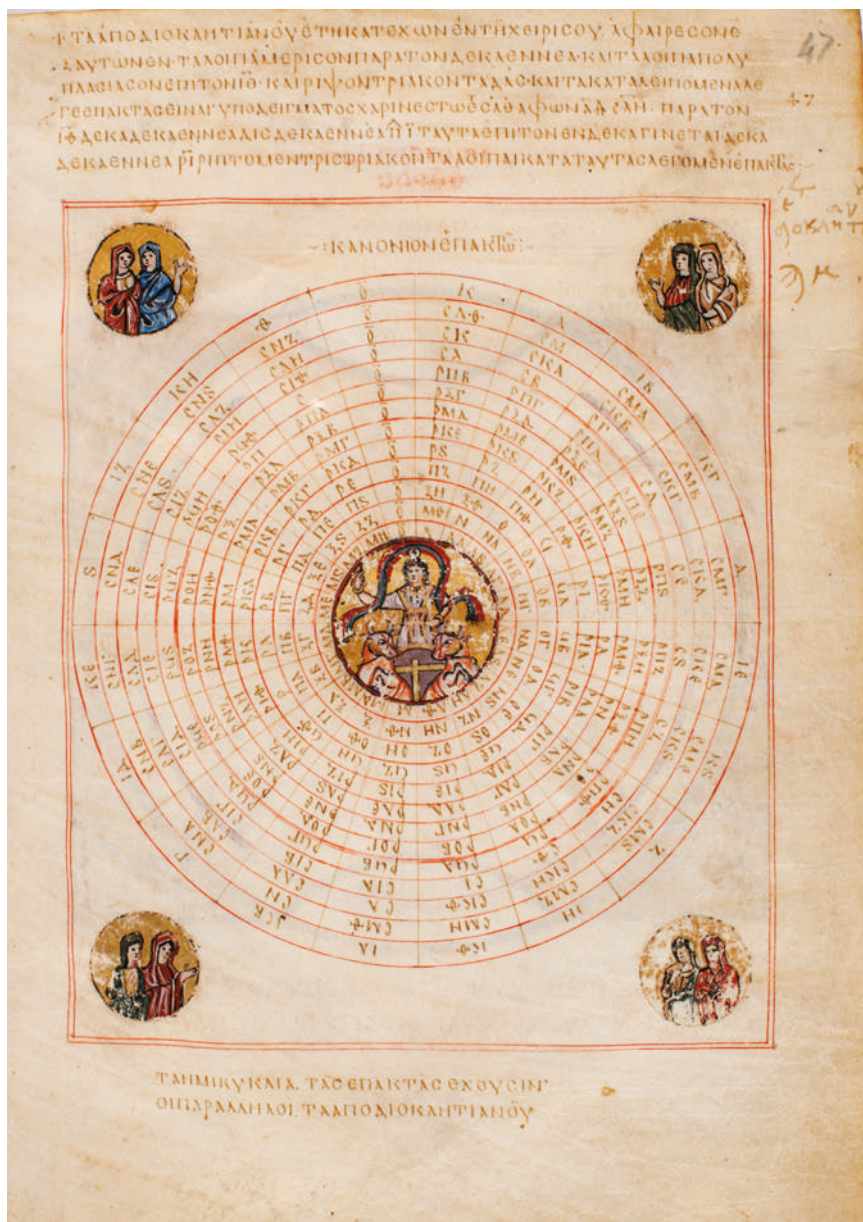




FIGURE 5.2 Sun table of Ptolemy's Handy Tables (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticanus graecus 1291, fol. 9r.)
BIBLIOTECA APOSTOLICA VATICANA

offered vinegar and gall on the cross (Mt. 27:34, 48). Next to the Crucifixion a second illustration shows two men whitewashing the circular image of Christ. The obvious association between crucifying Christ and whitewashing his image is further emphasized by the inscriptions “they [mixed] vinegar and gall” and “they mixed water and lime on his face”.¹⁴

The *Khludov Psalter* was probably produced shortly after the defeat of iconoclasm, namely during the time of patriarch Methodios (843–847) and his chief advisor Michael the Synkellos from the Chora Monastery.¹⁵ Therefore, it illustrates the handling of images in a very intriguing way, but above all offers a retrospective – and iconophile – view on the Iconoclast era. This iconophile perspective is, however, all the more remarkable because the psalter does not show the destruction of icons, but only their whitewashing. Hence, the often repeated burning or otherwise destroying of images that occur in the iconophile texts finds no expression in the *Khludov Psalter*. But does the material culture from the period of Byzantine iconoclasm itself confirm this rather moderate attitude towards religious images? The surviving material evidence seems to verify and falsify this thesis at the same time.

One of the most difficult categories of evidence in answering this are surviving *icons*, defined according to the modern narrow definition as a particular kind of religious image on portable panels depicting one or more holy persons or Christian scenes relevant to the Orthodox liturgy, rather than the original sense of the Greek word *eikon* that simply means image. The problem for a chapter devoted to material culture is that exceedingly few icons survive from the Iconoclast era or before it. This is neither proof of limited production nor of mass destruction. Rather it is a reminder of the very high loss of all material evidence from the period, and the relative lack of durability of this particular form of material culture. Irrespective of the thoroughness of image destruction, only the most benign circumstances would have allowed an icon produced more than a millennium ago to survive to the present. As a result, the handful of icons we do possess that probably date from the period are essentially all preserved in one place, the monastery of St Catherine’s on Mount

14 This association was already known before the production of the marginal-psalters, as the anti-iconoclastic text *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, PG 95: 309–344, esp. 333A–336B, proves; see John Martin, “The Dead Christ on the Cross in Byzantine Art,” in Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Late Classical and Medieval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Fried Jr.* (Princeton: 1955), 189–96, 192.

15 Corrigan, *Psalters*, 124–134. For an unlikely earlier dating to Second Iconoclasm see Marie-France Auzépy, “Un modèle iconoclaste pour le psautier Chludov?,” in A. Avraméa et al. (eds.), *Byzantium, State and Society* (Athens: 2003), 11–29.



FIGURE 5.3 Khludov Psalter (State Historical Museum of Russia, Moscow, MS. Gr.129d, fol.23v)
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



FIGURE 5.4 Khludov Psalter (State Historical Museum of Russia, Moscow, MS. Gr.129d, fol. 67r)
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Sinai.¹⁶ Its unique combination of institutional durability from late antiquity to the present, desert climate, and physical distance in faraway Sinai, means that it provided an almost ideal environment for preservation. And yet even here the number of icons from the period is small. It is also difficult to date them, lacking as they do any inscriptions or other dating indications. For this reason, the chronological classification of the icons is based solely on comparison with the few datable paintings from the Iconoclast era, which is further complicated by the fact that an icon style before the 11th century does not seem to have had any close parallels to other paintings.¹⁷ Furthermore, the chronological order of the Sinai icons dated to the Iconoclast era is largely the result of a methodologically problematic comparison that takes this isolated group almost exclusively into consideration.¹⁸ In addition to the question of an exact dating of the Sinai icons, their place of production must also remain unclear. Contrary to previous suggestions, Mount Sinai was not isolated after the Arab conquest in the 7th century.¹⁹ Instead, the peninsula was well integrated into the pilgrims' routes and while some of the icons may have had their origin at Mount Sinai itself others may have derived from other parts of the Empire.²⁰ Owing to these more than complicated circumstances and the fact that most of the Sinai icons are not even securely datable to the period under discussion, the following survey will focus on only two examples, which illustrate the key issues.

An Icon of the Crucifixion (Sinai B.36) that may originate from the monastery of St Catherine itself exemplifies the comparison with paintings (Figure 5.5).²¹ On the panel, the right part of which is in poor condition, Christ is identified as IC [XC] and – unusually for Greek icons – as the “King of the

16 Kurt Weitzmann, *The Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai: The Icons* (Princeton: 1976), is still the most relevant study on the Sinai icons. See also Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 55–74.

17 Weitzmann, *Icons*, 4.

18 Weitzmann, *Icons*, 57–82.

19 This is supposed by Weitzmann, *Icons*, 5.

20 For the continuous usage of the routes see David Jacoby, “Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Late Fifteenth Century,” in Robert Nelson and Kristen Collins (eds.), *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground: Icons from Sinai* (Los Angeles: 2006), 79–93.

21 Hans Belting and Christa Belting-Ihm, “Das Kreuzbild im ‘Hodegos’ des Anastasios Sinaites: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der ältesten Darstellung des toten Crucifixus,” in Walter Schumacher (ed.), *Tortulae: Studien zu altchristlichen und byzantinischen Monumenten* (Rome: 1966), 30–39, 37–38; Weitzmann, *Icons*, 61–64; Anna Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton: 1986), 40, 60, 234–235; Ioli Kalavrezou, “Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became Meter Theou,” *DOP* 44 (1990), 165–172, 169–170. The Crucifixion is illustrated on two other icons (B.32 and B.50).

Jews" (Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΟΝ ΗΟΥΔ[ΑΙΩΝ] and depicted on the cross. He wears a *kolobion* and the crown of thorns; his head was originally flanked by four half-figures of angels as well as by the sun and the moon. The thieves Gestas (ΓΕΣΤΑΣ) and Demas (ΔΗΜ[ΑC]), named for the first time here, accompany Christ; due to the poor condition of the right part of the panel the latter can be recognized only by his inscription. The Virgin Mary (Η ΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ) and John the Evangelist (ΙΩΑΝΝΗΣ) appear on either side of the cross. Below the cross, three soldiers gamble for Christ's clothes.

The depiction of the Crucifixion on the Sinai icon shows at least two important peculiarities. The first is that two streams, one of blood and one of water, run out of the wound beneath the right arm of Christ. This detail provides a chronological delimitation, since the depiction of two separate streams was unknown in late antiquity and is believed to have only occurred after the Quinisext Council of 692, when the mixing of water and wine during the Eucharist was instituted.²² The same illustration of this liturgical practice is known from the Theodotus Chapel at Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, which was painted during the papacy of Zacharias (741–752) (Figure 2.8).²³ Apart from general iconographic similarities between the Crucifixion of the Sinai icon and the Crucifixion in the private funerary chapel of Theodotus, the separation of two streams that emerge from Christ's wound is the closest parallelism of these two examples. The mid-8th-century chapel thus supports the theory that this iconography was developed after the Quinisext Council and that both examples from Rome and Mount Sinai are early evidence of its visualization. However, a small but important difference between the fresco in the apse of the chapel and the icon is provided in Christ's eyes. While the Roman Christ is depicted with open eyes, the Sinai Christ hangs from the cross with closed eyes – the second peculiarity of the icon. Apart from the Sinai icon, it is commonly assumed that images of Christ dead on the cross only occurred after the defeat of iconoclasm. One of the earliest examples is the already discussed *Khludov Psalter* from the mid-9th century, which simultaneously – and this seems to be significant for the transition of this peculiar iconography – shows

22 Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 234–235.

23 Hans Belting, "Eine Privatkapelle im frühmittelalterlichen Rom," *DOP* 41 (1987), 55–69, 55–67; Natalia Teteriatnikov, "For Whom is Theodotus Praying? An Interpretation of the Program of the Private Chapel in S Maria Antiqua," *Cahiers archéologiques* 41 (1993), 37–46; Lesley Jessop, "Pictorial Cycles of Non-Biblical Saints: The Seventh- and Eighth-Century Mural Cycles in Rome and Contexts for their Use," *Papers of the British School in Rome* 67 (1999), 233–279.



FIGURE 5.5 Sinai Icon of the Crucifixion (Sinai B.36)
BY PERMISSION OF SAINT CATHERINE'S MONASTERY, SINAI, EGYPT.
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MICHIGAN-PRINCETON-ALEXANDRIA
EXPEDITIONS TO MOUNT SINAI

the living and the dead Christ on the cross.²⁴ Nonetheless, several texts written by Chalcedonians in response to the Monophysites emphasize the reality of Christ's death, including the *Hodegos* (Guide Along the Right Path) written, perhaps not coincidentally, by Anastasios of Sinai in the late 7th century.²⁵ If the chronological concordance of the Theodotus Chapel at Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome and the Sinai icon holds true and the icon originates from the mid-8th century as well, it would be the oldest known representation of the dead Christ on the cross.

The comparison just described between the Sinai icons and presumably contemporary paintings and the accompanying problems is seen in a second example from Mount Sinai, the Icon of St Eirene (Sinai B.39) (Figure 5.6). On this panel, St Eirene, who is identified by an inscription (Η ΑΓΙΑ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ), is shown frontally and in full-length. She wears a long coat that also covers her head and holds a cross and a piece of cloth in front of her body. Her golden halo is framed with pearls. Next to Eirene's right feet kneels a much smaller man with short dark hair and beard. He is likewise identified by an inscription as Nicholas of the Sabas Monastery (ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ [ΣΑΒ]ΑΤΙΑΝΟΣ). Both Eirene and Nicholas are depicted on a narrow strip of ground against a green background. In comparison with paintings, the icon of St Eirene has been dated to the 7th century. The determining examples originate from Egypt and include an icon of Christ and Menas from Bawit that is now housed in the Louvre, and wall paintings from the Jeremias Monastery at Saqqara. The most obvious parallels between the Sinai icon and these paintings are the figural proportions with oversized heads and torsi, the linear drapery of the garment, and single motifs such as the dotted frames of the garment's clavi.²⁶ However, apart from the examples from Egypt, all of these particular characteristics can also be found in the Sinai icons themselves. The closest parallel is the Icon of St Peter, Paul, Nicholas, and John Chrysostom (B.33) that shows the same figural proportions, the linearity of drapery, and the dotted clavi. A further correlation between the two icons is the golden halo, which also appears on the triptych wings of the Icon of St John (B.34) and the Icon of the Virgin (B.35).²⁷ These parallelisms led to the aforementioned attempt to draw a chronological order within the isolated group of the Sinai icons itself. Unfortunately, the two different approaches of

24 The dead Christ is depicted on fols. 45v and 72v; the living Christ is depicted on fol. 67r, discussed above.

25 Belting and Belting-Ihm, "Crucifixus"; Kartsonis, *Anastasis*, 40–68.

26 Weitzmann, *Icons*, 66–67; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: 1994), 78–80.

27 Weitzmann, *Icons*, 60–61.



FIGURE 5.6 Sinai Icon of St Eirene (Sinai B.39)

BY PERMISSION OF SAINT CATHERINE'S MONASTERY, SINAI, EGYPT.
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MICHIGAN-PRINCETON-ALEXANDRIA
EXPEDITIONS TO MOUNT SINAI

investigation – on the one hand comparing the icons with paintings and on other making comparisons within the Sinai group – lead to two very different datings. While the paintings suggest an origin for the St Eirene icon in the 7th century, the other Sinai icons argue for a date in the 8th or 9th century.²⁸ Since both views are justifiable and understandable, both have found their adherents. Without committing to either the date, this is an impressive example of the enigmatic classification of all the Sinai icons.

²⁸ For the early dating see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 78–80; for the later dating see Weitzmann, *Icons*, 66–67.

An even more hotly disputed object is the *Trier Ivory* (Figure 5.7). In the foreground of the ivory on the left is depicted a horse-drawn carriage with two sitting men holding a reliquary. The carriage is accompanied by further participants of a relic procession, whose destination is a church in the right part of the panel, standing prominently in front of which is an empress holding a cross. In the background is a multistoreyed colonnade with one half-figure in each of the bays. Finally, there is an image of Christ – unmistakably identified by the cruciform nimbus – in a lunette above the front of a portico on the left side of the ivory. It is this, at first sight rather inconspicuous image, that has given the Trier Ivory a special place in the historiography of iconoclasm, for it is widely thought to depict the icon of Christ on the Chalke gate.²⁹ In the traditional narrative, Leo III began his campaign of image destruction by having the icon of Christ on the Chalke gate, the main entrance to the imperial palace, taken down and destroyed. This icon was subsequently restored by Eirene, taken down once more by Leo V, before being finally restored after 843. However, recently it has been questioned whether there had even been an image of Christ on the Chalke gate before the (re)installation by Empress Eirene around the year 800, arguing that the story of Leo's removal was a later iconophile legend.³⁰ If the Trier Ivory does indeed depict the Chalke icon it would provide a *terminus ante quem* for the contentious icon.

Unfortunately, the interpretation of the Trier Ivory and particularly its date are highly debated. It is a more or less singular example with no closely related contemporary parallels, either stylistically or technically. The only comparable examples – the so-called Leo sceptre, which has now been recognized as a comb, and the David casket – were carved only in the late 9th or early 10th century.³¹ This is one reason why after decades of attributing the Trier Ivory to

29 This interpretation has been supported by recent excavations of the Chalke gate that confirm that the Trier Ivory's depiction of a gate with flanking niches is accurate. See Asuman Denker, "The Great Palace," in *Byzantine Palaces in Istanbul*, eds. Gülbahar Baran Çelik et. al. (Istanbul: 2001), 11–69, 16–17.

30 For the date of the first image of Christ on the Chalke gate see Cyril Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen: 1959), 110–116; Marie-France Auzépy, "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?" *Byzantion* 40 (1990), 445–92, 451–472. For the scholarly debate since, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 128–135.

31 For the comb see Gudrun Bühl and Hiltrud Jehle, "Des Kaisers altes Zepter – des Kaisers neuer Kamm," *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz* 39 (2002), 289–306. For the casket see Anthony Cutler and Nicolas Oikonomides, "An Imperial Byzantine Casket and its Fate at a Humanist's Hand," *Art Bulletin* 70 (1988), 77–87.



FIGURE 5.7 Trier ivory

HOHE DOMKIRCHE TRIER (PHOTO: A. MÜNCHOW)

late antiquity, most recent scholarship prefers a considerably later date for the carving.³²

The dating of the Trier Ivory is also connected with interpretation of its subject matter, with two very different interpretations being offered in recent scholarship. The first, which has generally been accepted, thinks it depicts the translation of a relic of St Stephen to Constantinople, which is supposed to have taken place in 421 but which is first recorded in the early 9th-century *Chronicle* of Theophanes, and which story might have been created only during the iconophile intermission.³³ As such the carving dates to either post 421 and the historical event of the translation, or after the creation of the story in the late 8th century at the earliest. In this reading, the church under construction – craftsmen are depicted still working on the roof of the church – represents

32 Kenneth Holum and Gary Vikam, "The Trier Ivory: 'Adventus' Ceremonial, and the Relics of St. Stephen," *DOP* 33 (1979), 115–133; John Wortley, "The Trier Ivory Reconsidered," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 21 (1980), 381–394; Leslie Brubaker, "The Chalke Gate, the Construction of the Past, and the Trier Ivory," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 23 (1999), 258–285; Parome Chatterjee, "Iconoclasm's Legacy: Interpreting the Trier Ivory," *The Art Bulletin* 100 (2018), 28–47.

33 For the interpretation that the scene depicts the translation of St Stephen's arm in 421 see Holum and Vikan, "Trier Ivory." For the possibility that this was a much later invented story, see Wortley, "Trier Ivory."

Hagios Stephanos in Daphne, where a relic of St Stephen was treasured. The background with the Chalke gate and the colonnade is not interpreted as a perspective correct representation, but as an abbreviation of the imperial palace of the Byzantine capital. The second interpretation of the Trier Ivory, however, assumes that the panel shows a definite and far more recent historical event in its real setting.³⁴ According to this view, the carving commemorates the installation of the image of Christ at the Chalke gate and the renovation of the church of St Euphemia. Both events were carried out in the last years of the 8th century during the reign of Empress Eirene, who is identified as the empress receiving the procession. The perspective of the depiction is believed to be authentic with the Chalke gate at the left margin, the multistoreyed hippodrome in the background, and the church of St Euphemia at the right side; the procession of the relics is supposed to have started at the Hagia Sophia and then followed the Mese. Despite the worthwhile questioning of long-established interpretations, it remains debatable in this new reading why the hexagonal church of St Euphemia should have been depicted as a basilica. Furthermore, not all inconsistencies between depiction and interpretation can be explained by damages caused by earthquakes.

Another illuminating category of material evidence is *coinage*.³⁵ Coins have several advantages for the historian of the Iconoclast era. Coinage was essentially the only medium in the Byzantine world that could be described, even vaguely, as a mass medium and as such able to reach a far wider audience than a high-prestige and costly item such as a silk, ivory, or manuscript. As such it was major channel for political communication, though the extent to which the users of coins noticed or cared about such messages is hard to establish. Moreover, coinage is, usually, much easier to date with precision, than the other forms of material culture surveyed so far. This and their abundance mean they offer invaluable economic, administrative, and political data.

By the late 7th century Byzantium employed a well-established iconography on its coins. On the most important, the gold *nomisma*, the ruling emperor was depicted on the obverse, i.e., the front, and a cross-on-steps on the reverse. If there was a co-emperor or co-emperors they could be depicted on either the obverse or reverse. Ignoring specifics, this was a truly ancient formula, with a

34 Philipp Niewöhner, "Historisch-topographische Überlegungen zum Trierer Prozessions-selbstbein, dem Christusbild an der Chalke, Kaiserin Irenes Triumph im Bilderstreit und der Euphemiakirche am Hippodrom," *Millennium* 11 (2014), 261–288.

35 The section on coins and seals is written by Mike Humphreys. For an introduction to Byzantine coinage, see Philip Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage* (Washington DC: 1999). For the coinage of the Iconoclast era, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 116–28.

ruler's portrait on the obverse and a mark of denomination on the reverse. It was also ancient practice to have religious symbols on coins, and the cross-on-steps had been employed since the late 6th century. Around 690 Justinian II disrupted this iconography by having his own portrait demoted to the reverse, and in its stead on the obverse placed a bust of Christ (Figure 5.8).³⁶ This was the first time a figural representation of Christ had been used on imperial coins. Alongside the near contemporaneous canon 82 of the Quinisext Council that declared that Christ should be depicted figurally, these coins made imperial support for religious figural imagery explicit, indeed unmissable.³⁷ Precisely why Justinian II did this is disputed, but the context of rivalry with the Caliphate cannot be mere coincidence. The last round of great power conflict between the Empire and Caliphate, which would finally decide the balance of power in the Near East, was about to begin.³⁸ Byzantium lost that fight, and Justinian his throne in 695, though he was able to recapture it in 705 and reintroduce a modified version of his Christ coinage.³⁹ However, Justinian's second reign proved even more turbulent than his first, and in 711 he was overthrown and killed, and his successors reverted to traditional iconography on their coins. Meanwhile in the 690s the Caliphate was engaged in its own numismatic experimentation, which would culminate in 697 with the creation of aniconic coinage crammed full with Quranic inscriptions that explicitly denied the idea that God had a son.⁴⁰ So while Byzantium explicitly embraced religious figural imagery twice on its coins, in a period coinciding with defeat and political turmoil, the Caliphate explicitly embraced aniconism and triumphed.

While any link between the coinage reforms of Justinian II and iconoclasm can only ever be speculative, the reforms of the Isaurian emperors are more direct evidence. Leo III instituted a range of numismatic reforms to mark the

36 *DOC* 2.2, 568–70, 578–80. For the dating of this much discussed coinage see Mike Humphreys, “A War of Images? Justinian II’s Coinage Reform and the Caliphate,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 173 (2013), 229–44; and Cecile Morrisson and Vivien Prigent, “L’empereur et le calife (690–695). Réflexions à propos des monnayages de Justinien II et d’Abd al-Malik,” *Topoi* Supplement 12 (2013), 571–92.

37 *Quinisext Council*, ed. Heinz Ohme, *ACO* 2.4 (Berlin: 2013), canon 82.

38 James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford: 2010), 488–501.

39 *DOC* 2.2, 644–45, 648–50.

40 For the complicated and contested evolution of Islamic coinage in the late 7th century, see Stefan Heidemann, “The Evolving Representation of the Early Islamic Empire and its Religion on Coin Imagery,” in Angelika Neuwirth et al. (eds), *The Qur’ān in Context* (Leiden: 2010), 149–95.



FIGURE 5.8 Coin of Justinian II

DUMBARTON OAKS, RESEARCH AND LIBRARY COLLECTION, BZC.1948.17.2348

elevation of his son Constantine V to co-emperor in 720. In particular, Leo introduced a new silver coin, the *miliaresion*.⁴¹ In shape and design, the *miliaresion* clearly took inspiration from Islamic *dirhams* (Figure 5.9). Notably, instead of a ruler portrait on the obverse, it is filled with words. However, rather than words from scripture, let alone the Quran, these proclaimed: “O Leo and Constantine, emperors by [the grace of] God”. Even more importantly, the reverse contained a strident Christian message, with its prominent cross surrounded by the legend: *Iesus Christus Nika*, “Jesus Christ Conquers”. The *miliaresion* thus appropriated an Islamic design to proclaim a defiant imperial Christian message, one that associated the themes of the cross, victory, and dynasty. Read as a response to Islam, this was a clear and coherent message that neatly sidestepped any criticism over religious figural imagery by not using any. But there is no obvious evidence that anyone in Byzantium in 720 was as yet complaining about religious figural imagery. Instead of interpreting the *miliaresion* in light of the iconoclasm that was yet to come, it is better read as a positive decision in the context of Leo III’s early reign to emphasize the cross, victory, and dynasty. Indeed, so potent was this message that the design was kept essentially unaltered throughout the vicissitudes of the iconoclast debate.

41 *DOC* 3.1, 227, 231–2, 251–53.



FIGURE 5.9 Miliareasion of Leo III, overstruck on an Islamic *dirham*
BARBER INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS, BIRMINGHAM, B4519

The importance of dynasty is even clearer on Leo III's *nomismata*, for there he replaced the traditional cross on steps on the reverse with a portrait of Constantine v.⁴² And while at first there was a nod to physical reality, with the two-year old Constantine shown as a small child who progressively grew, he was also depicted in the same pose and dress as his father. Soon Constantine became the mirror image of his father, save for being beardless. Constantine v would markedly expand on this dynastic image. Indeed, for the first decade of his rule he continued to mint issues with his dead father on the obverse, and himself, now bearded, on the reverse. It was only with the birth and elevation of Leo IV in 751 that Constantine appeared on the obverse, flanked by his infant son.⁴³ More remarkably, the bust of Leo III was retained on the reverse. This was a numismatic statement of dynasty that was hitherto unparalleled in Byzantine history. Again, it is impossible to read a direct iconoclast message from these coins beyond the fact that they eschewed religious figural imagery, while being perfectly happy to employ imperial portraits.

In part because the coins of the first two iconoclast emperors had nothing explicitly "iconoclast" about them, they largely set the model that emperors used throughout the rest of the period regardless of their stand on the image question. It was only after 843 that a radical shift occurred, with the bust of Christ returning from the coins of Justinian II.⁴⁴ Thereafter, the Byzantine

42 *DOC* 3.1, 229–30, 241–46.

43 *DOC* 3.1, 291–4, 299–301.

44 *DOC* 3.1, 454–58, 461–64.

Empire proclaimed its iconophile status through busts of Christ, the Virgin, and the occasional saint on its coins, these religious figures sometimes even squeezing out the imperial image. Perhaps nothing better speaks of the rise of the icon after iconoclasm than its growing prominence on coins, that quintessentially imperial medium.

Imperial *seals* by and large followed a similar pattern to the coinage.⁴⁵ Since the mid-6th century imperial seals depicted the Virgin and infant Christ on the obverse and the emperor(s) on the reverse. Having removed his brothers from the throne, Constantine IV between 681–85 experimented with his seals, on one type having himself depicted on the obverse with a cross on the reverse, while on another keeping the Virgin on the obverse but changing the type to the *Hodegetria*.⁴⁶ This latter type was adopted by subsequent emperors, including Leo III on his seals issued between 717 and 720. From 720, however, Leo's seals no longer depicted the Virgin. Rather, they either followed a design similar to his *nomisma* with Leo III on the obverse and Constantine V on the reverse, or a design like the *miliaresion*, with on one side the inscription "Leo and Constantine, faithful emperors of the Romans", and on the other a cross surrounded by the Trinitarian tag "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Figure 5.10).⁴⁷ Like the contemporaneous changes on the coins, there is nothing necessarily iconoclast about these changes. Rather, both types were intended to emphasize the dynasty and its piety. However, the decision to forego the depiction of the Virgin did break with two centuries of tradition. What we can say for certain is that the coins and seals tell us that Leo was experimenting with the imperial message, and by 720 it was already devoid of religious figural imagery. It is also interesting that the seals of several high-ranking functionaries from around 726–50 carry quotations from the Psalms, a very rare phenomenon, which would suggest that Leo III's heavily Old Testament-influenced ideology was ascribed to by at least some of the elite.⁴⁸

The seals seem to follow the vicissitudes of the iconoclast debate more closely than the coinage. The iconoclast Constantine V and Leo IV used the epigraphic type similar to the *miliaresion*.⁴⁹ In contrast, imperial busts were depicted on the seals of Constantine VI, while the Virgin and child returned on some seals of Nikephoros I.⁵⁰ With the return of iconoclasm in 815 the

45 See Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 129–140.

46 *DOSeals* 6.23–24.

47 *DOSeals* 6.28–31.

48 Joseph Glynias, "Prayerful Iconoclasts: Psalm Seals and Elite Formation in the First Iconoclast Era (726–50)," *DOP* 71 (2017), 65–94.

49 *DOSeals* 6.32–34.

50 *DOSeals* 6.35–41.



FIGURE 5.10 Seal of Leo III
DUMBARTON OAKS, RESEARCH AND LIBRARY COLLECTION,
BZS.1958.106.588

epigraphic type once again became popular. However, the correlation between figural imagery on the seals of iconophile emperors and the lack of it on those of the iconoclasts was never total, with for instance the iconoclast Theophilos employing both types.⁵¹ As with the coins, there was a decisive shift after 843, when a bust of Christ was placed on the obverse while those of the emperor(s) were on the reverse, a pattern that essentially lasted until the end of the empire.⁵²

This survey of objects has shown that both non-religious and religious images were produced during the Iconoclast era. But what happened to older non-religious and religious images? Did they likewise experience a moderate handling, as the production of new images suggests, or were they destroyed, as the later iconophile texts claim? Some insight into this issue is given by the *Parastaseis syntomon chronikai* (*Brief Historical Expositions*) from the 8th or 9th century, a confusing text explored more fully elsewhere.⁵³ What we should note here is that the text records numerous statues from the ancient world that

⁵¹ *DOSeals* 6.45–46.

⁵² *DOSeals* 6.48.

⁵³ See Chapter 3 in the present volume.

were in Constantinople during the Iconoclast era, the vast majority of which survived undisturbed until 1204 and the plundering by the crusaders.⁵⁴

However, the question of how to deal with older pictures did not only concern ancient statuary, but above all religious pictures. One of the most cited examples in this context is the room above the southwest ramp at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which has been convincingly identified as the *small sekreton* (council hall) of the patriarchate.⁵⁵ The small *sekreton* is a vaulted room with marble revetment at the walls' lower parts and mosaic on the upper parts and the vault. The vault's mosaic shows vine scrolls and a central medallion, of which only fragments of the border remain. The mosaic of the upper part of the walls is likewise largely destroyed. Originally, the mosaic covered all four semi-circular tympana, in which the window openings were embedded, but today only the panels on both sides of the now blocked-up window on the south wall are preserved (Figure 5.11). Both panels show a medallion with a central golden cross against a blue background. On closer inspection it is obvious that the mosaic has been disturbed below the medallions. Tesserae have been picked out where once inscriptions could be read.⁵⁶ However, the state of preservation of the former inscriptions is still good enough to reveal that each began with a small cross, followed by a shorter and then by a longer word. In-depth investigation suggests that below the medallion there was originally the text †O AGIOS followed by the name of a saint. This reconstruction makes it likely that there were once eight images of saints in the medallions. Their replacement with crosses has always been related to iconoclasm and at least two written sources confirm this assumption.⁵⁷ Although Theophanes and Nikephoros, the sources in question, date the substitution slightly differently, they both associate it with Patriarch Niketas. Theophanes tells us that in 766/67:

54 Albrecht Berger, "Die dunkle Seite der Sakralität; Verzauberte Orte und Statuen in Konstantinopel," in Armin Bergmeier et al. (eds.), *Erzeugung und Zerstörung von Sakralität zwischen Antike und Mittelalter* (Heidelberg: 2016), 97–107.

55 Mango, *Brazen House*, 53; Robin Cormack and Ernest Hawkins, "The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul: The Rooms above the Southwest Vestibule and Ramp," *DOP* 31 (1977), 175–251, 204–205.

56 Paul Underwood, "Notes on the Work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul: 1954," *DOP* 9/10 (1956), 291–300, 292–293.

57 Cyril Mango, *Materials for the Study of the Mosaics of St Sophia at Istanbul* (Washington: 1962), 94; Cormack and Hawkins, "Mosaics of St Sophia", 204–205, 210–211.



FIGURE 5.11 Small sekreton of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, south tympanum, west side
DUMBARTON OAKS, IMAGE COLLECTION AND FIELDWORKS ARCHIVES,
MS.BZ.004-HS.BIA.1255

[Niketas] scraped off the images in the small *sekreton* of the patriarchate, which were of mosaic, and those in the vault of the large *sekreton*, which were in paint, he removed and plastered the faces of the other images.⁵⁸

58 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1883–85), 443.

According to Nikephoros, however, in 768/69 Niketas:

restored certain structures of the cathedral church that had fallen into decay with time. He also scraped off the images of the saviour and of the saints done in golden mosaic and in encaustic that were in the ceremonial halls that stand there (these are called *sekreta* by the Romans), both in the small one and in the big one.⁵⁹

Regardless of the exact year in which the mosaic was renewed, it is clear that there must have been a considerable time lag between the beginning of iconoclasm and this event. According to Nikephoros' report it can also be assumed that the renewal was carried out in the course of other restoration work on Hagia Sophia.⁶⁰ The evidence of the small *sekreton* indicates that by no means were all pictures destroyed immediately at the beginning of the iconoclasm, not even in the capital.

As in the small *sekreton*, an older image was subsequently replaced by a cross in the *apse of the Koimesis Church in Nicaea*.⁶¹ The church was part of a monastery founded by Hyakinthos, whose monograms can be seen on a lintel as well as on several capitals.⁶² Furthermore, his dedicatory inscription has been preserved on a marble slab and reads: "Theotokos, help your servant Hyakinthos, monk, priest, abbot" (Θεοτόκε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Ὑακίνθῳ μοναχῷ πρεσβυτέρῳ ἡγουμένῳ). For architectural reasons and the fact that an abbot of the Hyakinthos monastery appears in the Acts of the Council of Nicaea in 787, the church is usually dated to the late 7th or early 8th century. Due to the building's destruction in the first quarter of the 20th century, unfortunately only

59 Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington, DC: 1990), 86.

60 No major construction works at the Hagia Sophia are known for this period. However, Urs Peschlow, "Die Hagia Sophia und das Erdbeben des Jahres 740," in Volker Hoffmann (ed.), *Die Hagia Sophia in Istanbul* (Bern: 1998), 89–102, suggests dating the partial renewal of the tympana walls to the 8th century.

61 Oskar Wulff, *Die Koimesiskirche in Nicäa und ihre Mosaiken nebst den verwandten kirchlichen Baudenkmälern* (Straßburg: 1903); Theodor Schmit, *Die Koimesis-Kirche von Nikaia: Das Bauwerk und die Mosaiken* (Berlin: 1927); Paul Underwood, "The Evidence of Restoration in the Sanctuary Mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea," *DOP* 13 (1959), 235–243; Charles Barber, "The Koimesis Church, Nicaea: The Limits of Representation on the Eve of Iconoclasm," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 41 (1991), 43–60.

62 For the lintel see Cyril Mango, "Notes d'épigraphie et d'archéologie: Constantinople, Nicée," *TM* 12 (1994), 343–357, 351–352.

photographs can be consulted today for one of the most remarkable aspects of the Koimesis Church – the alteration of its apse mosaic (Figures 5.12A and 12B). The photographs of the apse’s conch show a central image of the Virgin in front of a golden background. The Virgin is standing on a jewel-studded podium and holding the infant Christ in front of her breast. Above her head appear three rays of light and the hand of God from a segment of heaven. Parallel to the heaven segment there is also a quote from Psalm 109:3, which reads: “I have begotten thee from the womb before the morning” (†ΕΓ [for ἔκ] ΓΑΣΤΡΟΣ ΠΡΟ ΕΩΣΦΟΡΟΥ ΓΕΓΕΝΗΚΑ [FOR ΕΓΕΝΝΗΕΑ] ΣΕ).⁶³ The photographs from the early 20th century also provide information about the images of the bema’s barrel vault adjoining in the west (Figure 5.13). In a medallion in its summit were shown all the typical elements of a *hetoimasia* (the preparation of the throne, in a Christian context for the Second Coming): a backless and jewelled throne with a book and a dove above. On both sides of the *hetoimasia* two archangels were to be seen, which were identified by inscriptions (Figure 5.14). Each archangel holds a long staff with a banner on which the words of the Trisagion “Holy, Holy, Holy” (ΑΓΙΟΣ, ΑΓΙΟΣ, ΑΓΙΟΣ) are inscribed. Furthermore, a quote from Hebrew 1:6 runs below the archangels and reads [And when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith] “And let all the angels of God worship him” (ΚΑΙ ΠΡΟΚΥΝΗCΑΤΩCΑΝ ΑΥΤΩ ΠΑΝΤΕC ΑΓΓΕΛΟΙ [FOR ΑΓΓΕΛΟΙ] Θ[ΕΟ]Υ).⁶⁴ Finally, an inscription between the wings of two archangels names a certain Naukratios as the restorer of the images. Contrary to the barrel vault of the bema, where it is uncertain whether there has been a restoration or not, the alteration of the apse mosaic – which is usually attributed to the aforementioned Naukratios – is evident even in the photographs.⁶⁵ Around the standing Virgin an irregular black line is visible on the golden background. Another black line, which extends to both sides in the rough shape of a cross can be seen at the same level as the Virgin’s elbows. The suture visible in the photographs shows that an earlier image of the cross was subsequently replaced by the image of the Virgin and child. In order to make this alteration as inconspicuous as possible, gold tesserae were chosen for a uniform background; however, the new tesserae were somewhat darker so the cross could still be recognized. Since the suture at the level of the Virgin’s elbows is very heterogeneous, Ernst Kitzinger assumed that the cross was not the first image in the apse of the Koimesis Church, which was finally confirmed

63 For the interpretation of this inscription see Barber, “Koimesis Church,” 52–54.

64 Hebrews 1:6 derives from Psalm 96:6.

65 For the assumption that the archangels date only from after the defeat of iconoclasm see Underwood, “Church of the Dormition,” 240–242.

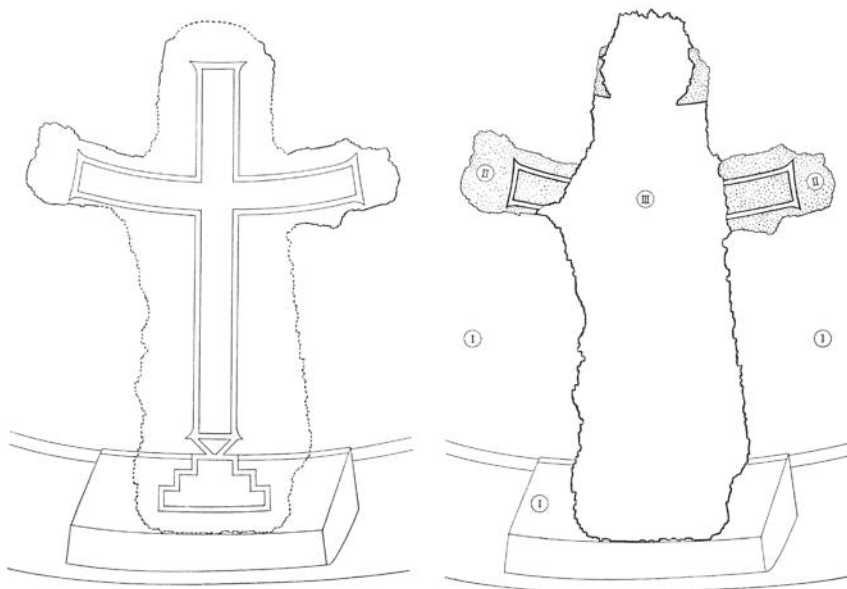


FIGURE 5.12A Apse of the Koimesis church in Nicaea UNDERWOOD, "CHURCH OF THE DORMITION," FIGS. 5.1-5.2

by Paul Underwood.⁶⁶ What was originally depicted in the apse is unclear. However, due to the uniform and homogenous background, the first image must not have extended further than the conch's centre. For this reason, it is widely assumed that a similar image of the Virgin and child could have been the original motif of the apse.⁶⁷

The *apse of the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki* is another example in which the image was changed. As in the aforementioned Koimesis Church, the image of Virgin and child in the apse that can be seen today does not belong to the church's original state, and was probably added in the 11th century (Figure 5.15).⁶⁸ As at Nicaea, older photographs, which were taken before an extensive restoration of the mosaics in 1941, show outlines of a cross on both sides of the Virgin (Figure 5.16). In contrast to Nicaea, however, these remains

66 Ernst Kitzinger, "Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm," in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress* 4, 1 (Munich: 1958), 12–16; Underwood, "Church of the Dormition".

67 Barber, "Koimesis Church."

68 Robin Cormack, "The Apse Mosaic of S. Sophia at Thessaloniki," *Journal of the Archaeological Society* 10 (1980–81), 111–135.



FIGURE 5.12B Apse of the Koimesis church in Nicaea SCHMIT, "KOIMESIS-KIRCHE," TAF. XX
(PHOTO: N. N. KLUGE)

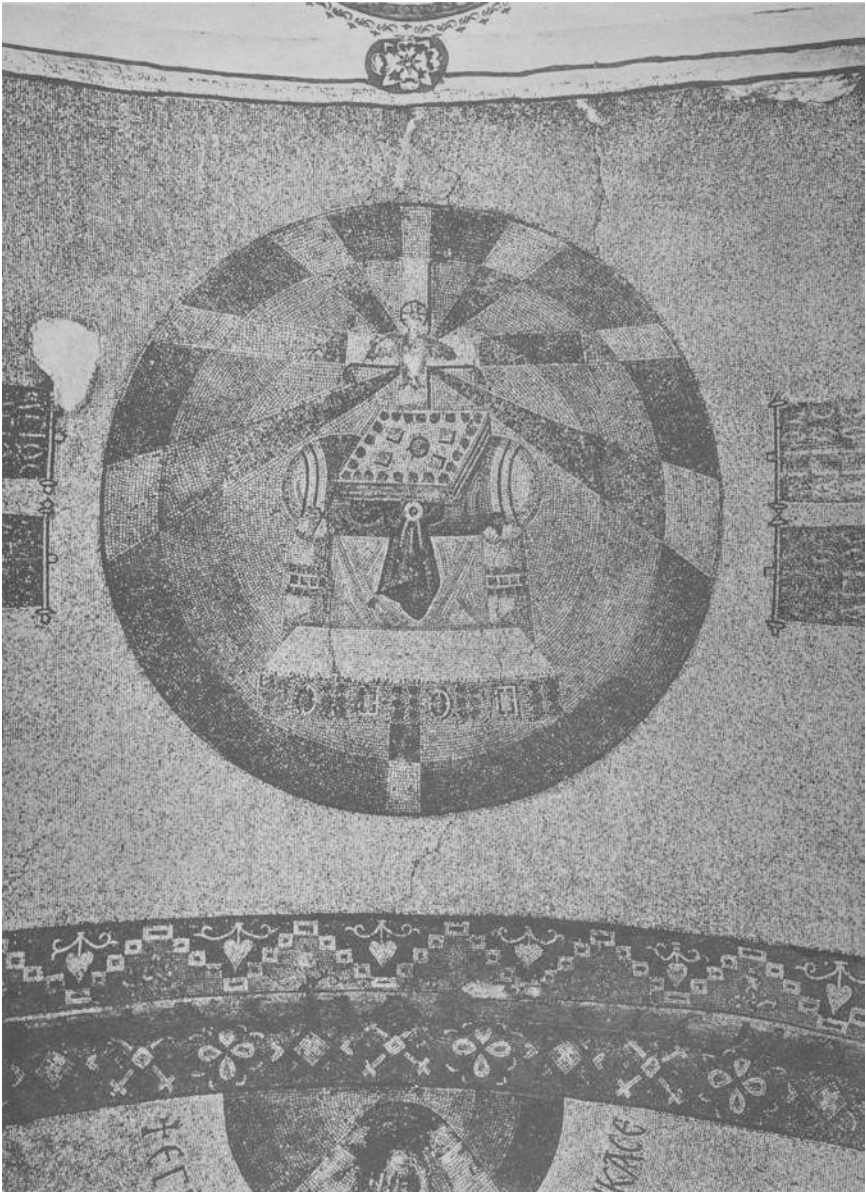


FIGURE 5.13 Hetoimasia mosaic in the bema of the Koimesis church in Nicaea
SCHMIT, "KOIMESIS-KIRCHE," TAF. XII (PHOTO: N. N. KLUGE)



FIGURE 5.14 Archangels in the bema of the Koimesis church in Nicaea
SCHMIT, "KOIMESIS-KIRCHE," TAF. XIII (PHOTO: N. N. KLUGE)

certainly belonged to the original mosaic decoration of the apse, in which a monumental cross on a golden background could be seen.⁶⁹ Part of this first

⁶⁹ Cormack, "Apse Mosaic," 117–118.



FIGURE 5.15 Apse of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki
CONWAY LIBRARY, THE COURTAULD, LONDON (PHOTO: THE COURTAULD)

decoration was also the inscription around the base of the apse semidome, which was subsequently interrupted by the installation of the Virgin and child.⁷⁰ The conflation from various phrases that were also used in the encaenia ceremony reads: “O Lord, and God of our fathers, establish this house until the end of time, in honour of you, your Only-Begotten Son, and your Holy Spirit” (†Κ[ύρι]ε ὁ Θε[ὸς] τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν στερέωσον τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον ἕως τῆς συντελεί[ας τοῦ αἰῶνος ἀσάλευ]τον πρὸς δόξαν σὴν καὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦ[ς] σου υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ παναγίου σου πνεύματος).⁷¹ Likewise part of the original decoration was the inscription around the face of the apse semidome, which is a quotation from Psalm 64:4-5: “We shall be filled with the good things of thy house; thy temple is holy; thou art wonderful in righteousness” (†Πλησθησόμεθα ἐν τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς τοῦ οἴκου σου, ἅγιος ὁ ναός σου, Θαυμαστός ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ).

Apart from the apse inscriptions, the mosaics of the barrel vault of the bema also belong to the original decoration of the Hagia Sophia. In the summit of the vault a medallion with a golden cross and surrounding stars

70 For all the inscriptions in the apse and the uniformity of inscription and mosaic see Cormack, “Apse Mosaic,” 119.

71 The conflation derives from Chronicles 29:18, the liturgy of the Eucharist, Mt. 28:20, and the Trinitarian doxology.



FIGURE 5.16 Apse of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki before the restoration in 1941
CHARLES DIEHL, MARCEL LETOURNEAU, AND HENRI SALADIN, *LES MONUMENTS CHRÉTIENS DE SALONIQUE* (PARIS: 1918), FIG. 59 (SECTION)
(PHOTO: M. LE TOURNEAU)

against a blue background is visible. On both sides of the barrel vault several rows of small squares with alternating crosses and leaves form rectangular patterns (Figure 5.17). Below this rectangular pattern is an inscription, which reads: “Christ, help Theophilos, humble bishop” (Χ[ριστ]έ βοήθη [for βοήθει] Θεοφίλου [north] ταπεινοῦ ἐπισκόπου [south]); monograms of Eirene, Constantine, and Theophilos accompany the inscription.⁷² Since the name of bishop Theophilos is known from the Acts of Nicaea II in 787, the combination of all three monograms allows identification as Constantine VI and his mother Eirene, who reigned together with a short interruption between 780

⁷² For the inscription and the monograms of the bema see Jean-Michel Spieser, “Inventaires en vue d'un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance: Les inscriptions de Thessalonique,” *TM* 5 (1973), 145–180, 159.

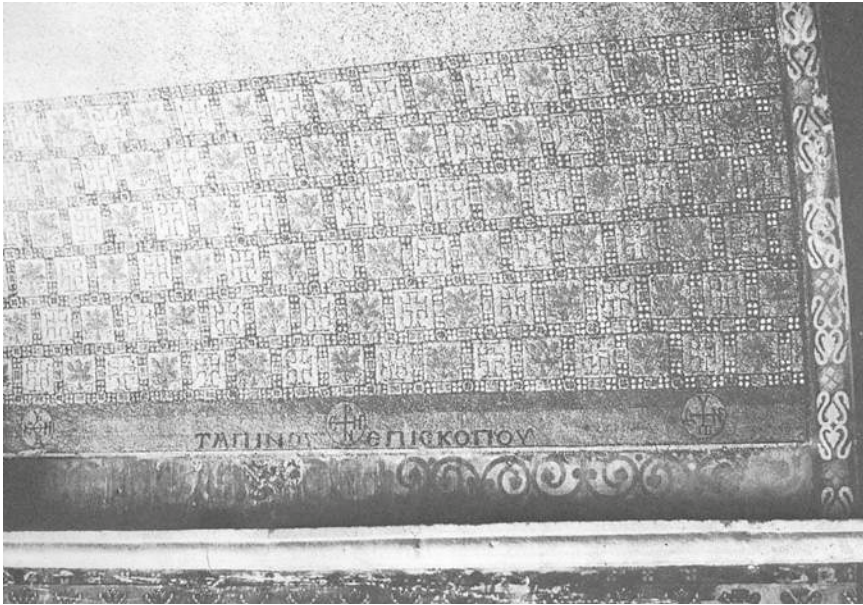


FIGURE 5.17 Bema mosaic in Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki
CORMACK, "THE ARTS," FIG. 3 (SECTION)

and 797.⁷³ Whether or not these monograms can be equated with the dating of the erection of the new church, which would then have taken place in the last quarter of the 8th century, cannot be conclusively clarified.⁷⁴ At least, there seems to have been a time lag between the erection of the church and the installation of the Ascension mosaic in the dome, which dates to the late 9th century and will be discussed later.⁷⁵ What is notable is that Constantine and Eirene, the rulers who revoked iconoclasm, chose to employ not an icon but a cross in the decoration of the apse and bema. Furthermore, the cross in the apse remained in place for centuries before it was replaced by Virgin and child. Monumental depictions of crosses did not disappear from the churches after

73 André Grabar, *L'iconoclisme byzantin: Dossier archéologique* (Paris: 1957), 175; Cormack, "Apse Mosaic," 115.

74 Cormack, "Apse Mosaic," 122–123, and Cyril Mango, *Byzantinische Architektur* (Stuttgart: 1975), 165, both argue Constantine and Eirene's journey to Thrace might have been the occasion for the rebuilding of the Hagia Sophia.

75 According to her unlikely completion of the indiction, Kalliope Theoharidou, *The Architecture of Hagia Sophia, Thessaloniki: From its Erection up to the Turkish Conquest* (Oxford: 1988), 155–57, dates the erection of the new church to the early 7th century.

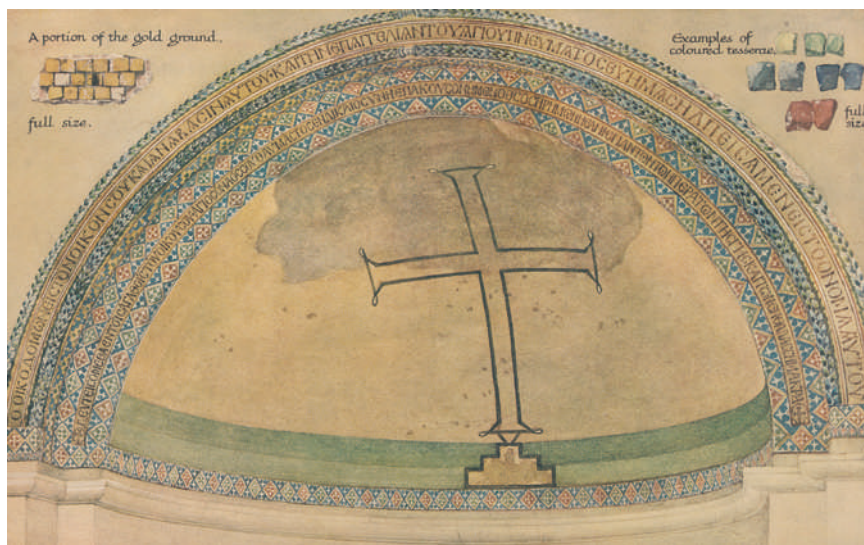


FIGURE 5.18 Apse of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople
GEORGE, *ST. EIRENE*, PL. 17

Byzantine iconoclasm, but were also compatible with the middle Byzantine decoration programme.

The long life of monumental crosses in apses becomes particularly evident in one of the most famous churches from the Iconoclast era: the mosaic cross on a golden background in the *apse of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople* (Figure 5.18)⁷⁶ As in Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, two inscriptions accompany the cross in the apse of the Church of Holy Peace in the Byzantine capital. The inscription around the inner face of the apse semidome quotes, like one of the inscriptions at Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki, from Psalm 64:4-5, even though a longer section was chosen in Constantinople: “We shall be filled with the good things of thy house; thy temple is holy; thou art wonderful in righteousness. Harken to us, O God our saviour; the hope of all the ends of the earth, and of them who are afar off on the sea” ([ΠΛΗCΘΗ]CΟΜΕΘΑ ΕΝ ΤΟΙC ΑΓΑΘΟΙC ΤΟΥ ΟΙΚΟΥ CΟΥ, ΑΓΙΟC Ο ΝΑΟC CΟΥ ΘΑΥΜΑCΤΟC ΕΝ

76 Walter George, *The Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (London: 1913); Robin Cormack, “The Arts during the Age of Iconoclasm,” in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham: 1977), 35–44; Urs Peschlow, *Die Irenenkirche in Istanbul: Untersuchungen zur Architektur* (Tübingen: 1977); Sabine Feist, *Die byzantinische Sakralarchitektur der Dunklen Jahrhunderte* (Wiesbaden: 2019), 25–46.

ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ ΕΠΑΚΟΥΣΟΝ ΗΜΩΝ Ο Θ[ΕΟ]C Ο C[ΩΤ]ΗΡ ΗΜΩΝ Η ΕΛΠΙC
ΠΑΝΤΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΠΕΡΑΤΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΓΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΝ ΘΑΛΑΣΣΗ ΜΑΚ[ΡΑ][Ν].⁷⁷
The inscription around the outer face of the apse semidome was certainly
originally based on Amos 9:6 and probably read: "It is he that builds his ascent
up to the sky, and establishes his promise on the earth; the Lord Almighty is
his name".⁷⁸

In addition to these three prominent examples of apse mosaics from Nicaea, Thessaloniki, and Constantinople, there is further evidence for the decoration of other parts of church interiors during Byzantine iconoclasm. Examples include the mosaics with geometric and vegetal decorations in the narthex of the Hagia Eirene in Constantinople. The mosaics date back to late antiquity but were probably repaired during the Iconoclast era.⁷⁹ In contrast to Hagia Eirene, the narthex of *Hagia Sophia in Vize* showed a figurative program.⁸⁰ There, above a pilgrim graffiti in the southwestern corner of the narthex, was a fresco of an orans. Another depiction of an orans and two figures with nimbus was shown besides the door between narthex and central nave. In Constantinople as well as in Vize, few fragments of painting have been preserved in the aisles and galleries: in Hagia Eirene these again show geometric and vegetal decorations as well as medallions with crosses.⁸¹ In the southern aisle of Hagia Sophia in Vize, the fresco fragments above the Arcosolium (A) are interpreted as an extended Deesis with Christ, the Virgin, and John the Baptist, flanked by an angel to each side (Figure 5.19).⁸² In addition to these

77 Inscription after Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 20. For a slightly different completion of the beginning of the inscription see George, *St. Eirene*, 50.

78 For the inscription, which was wrongly reconstructed especially in the second part, see George, *St. Eirene*, 48–50.

79 George, *St. Eirene*, 55–56 and Alessandro Taddei, "Remarks on the decoration wall-mosaics of Saint Eirene at Constantinople," in Mustafa Şahin (ed.), *11th International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics* (Istanbul: 2011), 883–896, mention these works without dating them.

80 For all depictions in the narthex of the Hagia Sophia in Vize see Franz Alto Bauer and Holger Klein, "The Church of Hagia Sophia in Bizye (Vize): Results of the Fieldwork Seasons 2003 and 2004," *DOP* 60 (2006), 249–270. Because all figurative paintings preserved in the church were painted directly on the plaster, they must have been part of the church's original decoration.

81 Crosses were present in the Hagia Eirene not only in the apse mosaic, the aisles, and galleries. The unusual orientation of the monogram capitals in the central nave – the monograms face the outer walls, while the crosses can be seen from the central nave – can possibly also be explained by the importance of the depiction of crosses for the decoration program of the church.

82 Yildiz Ötügen and Robert Ousterhout, "Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace," *Anatolian Studies* 39 (1989), 121–149, 142.

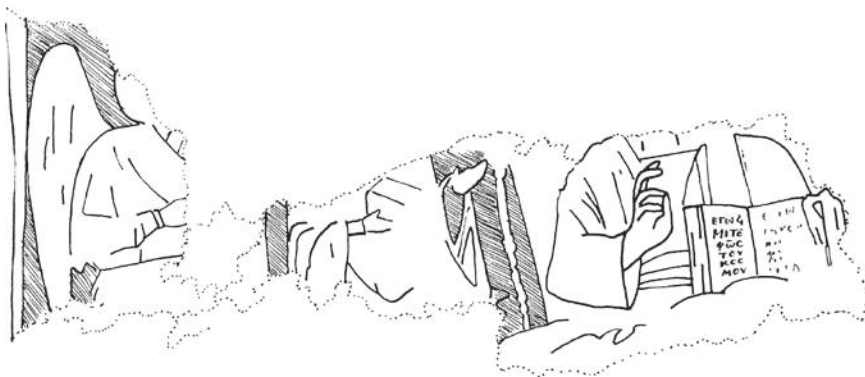


FIGURE 5.19 Deesis in the southern aisle of Hagia Sophia in Vize
ÖTÜKEN AND OUSTERHOUT, "TURKISH THRACE," FIG. 6

two examples, the aisles of the Lower City Church in Amorium must also be mentioned as evidence for the decoration programme of the churches' lateral spaces. There, standing prophets, saints or martyrs could be seen above marble-imitating paintings.⁸³

Our knowledge about the decoration of church domes is very sparse. Only in the *cupola of the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki* is the mosaic still preserved today (Figure 5.20). The mosaic shows the ascension of Christ, with Christ in an aureole carried by two angels in the centre. The twelve apostles, two angels, and the Virgin surround this scene. The depiction is accompanied by two inscriptions, one quoting a passage from the Ascension of Christ (Acts 1:11), the other referring to the mosaic's date of origin. In the latter, an archbishop Paul from Thessaloniki and an – unfortunately partly destroyed – indiction are mentioned. Archbishop Paul is usually identified with the bearer of this name, who held his office in 885; this date also coincides with the common completion of the indiction.⁸⁴ As already mentioned, there was thus a time lag of about 100 years between the first decoration of the church at the end of the 8th century and the creation of this – probably the first – cupola mosaic.⁸⁵

83 Chris Lightfoot, "The Amorium Project: The 1996 Excavation Season," *DOP* 52 (1998), 323–336, 325, 329. A description by Theodore the Studite (*PG* 99: 244B) suggests that cycles of saints were not unusual in the period.

84 For the dating of the dome mosaic see Spieser, "Inventaires," 145–180, 160–161; Cormack, "Apse Mosaic," 123–126. Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 148–153 completes the indiction differently. She proposes rather unconvincingly a time calculation otherwise unknown in Thessaloniki and comes to a dating in the year 690/91.

85 Cormack, "Apse Mosaic," 123.



FIGURE 5.20 Cupola of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki

ANTHONY CUTLER AND JEAN-MICHEL SPIESER, *DAS MITTELALTERLICHE BYZANZ* (MUNICH: 1996), FIG. 81 (SECTION) (PHOTO: S. CHAIDEMENOS)

Although all of these examples provide relatively little evidence of the churches' pictorial decoration during the Iconoclast era in general, a tendency can nevertheless be discerned from it. In the lateral spaces and the galleries, there could be vegetal and geometric decoration as well as a figurative programme. The cupolas, on the other hand, seem to have been reserved for the representation of Christ, even though the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki serves as the only evidence for this assumption. This pictorial programme, which is a reflection of the celestial hierarchy, shows close parallels to the much better investigated and in many cases better preserved decoration programme of churches of the middle Byzantine period.⁸⁶ In these, as can be concluded from written sources,

86 For the middle Byzantine period see for example Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration: Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (London: 1948); Cormack, "Painting after Iconoclasm."

the representation of the Pantocrator in the cupola and the depiction of saints in the lower zones was already established in the immediate aftermath of the defeat of Byzantine iconoclasm – at least in Constantinople.⁸⁷ The pictorial programme of middle Byzantine churches thus did not emerge without any precedents, but built upon foundations laid in the Iconoclast period.

A significant difference in the decoration systems of both periods, however, was the depiction in the apses. While in middle Byzantine times the apses were reserved for depictions of the Virgin⁸⁸, in the period under discussion they were decorated with crosses. The image of the cross and, above all, the dedicating inscriptions in the apses as they are preserved in Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki and Hagia Eirene in Constantinople, are an integral part of the entire decoration programme and its reflection of the celestial hierarchy. Psalm 64:4-5 has been read during the consecration of a church, at least in Constantinople, since Justinianic times and is thus as an inscription in the apse mosaic a timeless expression of the irrevocable and permanent sacrality of the church.⁸⁹ At the same time, the idea of a sacrality inherent in the church does not seem to have arisen only with the Iconoclast era. In the West, this idea found its expression in the consecration of the church building⁹⁰; for the East it has already been mentioned that such a rite can be proven for Constantinople at least since the Justinianic period.⁹¹ Furthermore, the apse mosaic of Hosios David in Thessaloniki is at least one known example with a similar inscription from the period before iconoclasm.⁹² There a painted codex has the following

87 For the written sources see the descriptions of the church of the Virgin of the Pharos (Photius, *Homil.* x, 6), the Nea Ekklesia (*Vita Basilii* 83–84), the church in the monastery of Kauleas (Leo VI, Sermon 28), and the church built by Stylianus Zaoutzas (Leo VI, *Sermon* 34). Even for the Chrysotriklinos of the Great Palace a similar programme is reported (*Anthol. Graeca* 1, 106). All texts are translated in Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (New Jersey: 1972), 184–86, 194, 202–05.

88 The aforementioned examples of the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki and the Koimesis Church in Nicaea show that this programme was so standardized by the middle Byzantine period that even older images of crosses were subsequently replaced.

89 For the reading of the psalm during the consecration see Cormack, “Apse Mosaic,” 119.

90 Miriam Czock, *Gottes Haus: Untersuchungen zur Kirche als heiligem Raum von der Spätantike bis ins Frühmittelalter* (Berlin: 2012), 4–5. For earlier examples of places and buildings where an inherent sacrality was attributed, see Paul Corby Finney, “Topos, Hieros und christlicher Sakralbau in vorkonstantinischer Überlieferung,” *Boreas Münstersche Beiträge zur Archäologie* 7 (1984), 193–225.

91 Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, ed. Henry Dewing (London: 1940), I, 1, 61, in a famous description of Hagia Sophia, also speaks for such an understanding of the church building.

92 Liz James, “Images of Text in Byzantine Art: The Apse Mosaic in Hosios David, Thessaloniki,” in Karin Krause and Barbara Schellewald (eds.), *Bild und Text im Mittelalter* (Cologne: 2011), 255–266.

inscription: “A living source, capable of receiving and nourishing the souls of the faithful [is] this all-honoured house” (†Πηγὴ ζωτικὴ, δεκτ[ικ]ή, θρεπτικὴ ψυχῶν πιστῶν ὁ πανέν[τι]μος οἴ[κ]ος ο[ὗ]τος).⁹³ In the inscription around the base of the apse semidome of Hosios David, the church building is likewise described as sacred: “A living source, capable of receiving and nourishing the souls of the faithful [is] this all-honoured house. Having vowed, I succeeded and succeeding I paid in full. For the vow of her of whom God knows the name” (†Πηγὴ ζ[ω]τικὴ, δεκτικὴ, θρεπτικὴ ψυχῶν πιστῶν ὁ πανέντιμος οἴ[κ]ος ο[ὗ]τος. Εὐξαμένη ἐπέτυχα καὶ ἐπιτυχούσα ἐπλήρωσα. †Υπὲρ εὐχῆς ἧς οἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα). In addition, the quotation from Isaiah 25:9-10 in the scroll that Christ holds in the mosaic has been changed so that the text does not refer to a “mountain” as in the original, but instead to a “house”: “Behold our God in whom we hope and we rejoice in our salvation, that he may grant rest to this house” († Ἰδοὺ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, ἐφ’ ᾧ ἐλπίζομεν καὶ ἡγαλιώμεθα ἐπὶ τῇ σωτηρίᾳ ἡμῶν ὅτι ἀνάπαυσιν δώσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον). Finally, a text attributed to Germanos I, Patriarch of Constantinople, testifies that the idea of a sacrality inherent in the church-building was more and more accepted even before iconoclasm and that the church-building was understood as a reflection of the celestial hierarchy: “the church is a heaven on earth wherein the heavenly God dwells and walks”.⁹⁴ During the period under discussion, this idea found its expression both in the dedicating inscriptions and in the pictorial programme of the churches.

Having explored the pictorial programmes of the churches constructed during the Iconoclast era, we shall now examine their architectural characteristics.⁹⁵ Again, our central question is whether the Iconoclast period between late antiquity and the Middle Byzantine era was so isolated. The most promising source for answering this question is a group of churches, which were not built *ex novo* in the period, but were rebuilt while maintaining large parts of older predecessors. At the same time, these churches continued to be used and adapted in the Middle Ages. They are thus a paradigm example of the importance of Byzantine iconoclasm as an interface between late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that ecclesiastical buildings

93 For all the mentioned inscriptions see James, “Hosios David,” 257–258.

94 Germanos I, *Historia mystagoga*, 1, ed. Frank Brightman, “The *Historia Mystagoga* and other Greek Commentaries on the Byzantine Liturgy,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1908), 248–67, 387–97; trans. Mango, *Sources*, 141–142.

95 Recently published studies on the architecture of this period are: Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*; Sabine Feist (ed.), *Transforming Sacred Spaces. New Approaches to Byzantine Ecclesiastical Architecture from the Transitional Period* (Wiesbaden: 2020).

were also built *ex novo* during the time under discussion and that both central and longitudinal churches were erected. The fact that the churches presented here were not built *ex novo* leads to two peculiarities. First, the churches are not divided into different architectural typologies. This is due to the fact that the various typologies are not clearly defined.⁹⁶ Second, the churches' predecessor phases must also be presented before their modification or reconstruction in the Iconoclast era is investigated. Only then can differences and similarities between the periods be shown.

Perhaps the most famous church from the Iconoclast period is *Hagia Eirene in Constantinople*, whose pictorial programme has already been discussed. Located in the immediate vicinity of Hagia Sophia, the first church was built under Constantine I and served as the first cathedral of the new capital of the Byzantine Empire.⁹⁷ The church was destroyed by fire during the Nika riots in 532, but Emperor Justinian I rebuilt it afterwards.⁹⁸ The Justinianic church was preceded by an atrium surrounded by two-storeyed porticos in the west (Figure 5.21). From the atrium one could reach the narthex, for which it is particularly noteworthy that from the beginning only its two outer passages could be closed by doors; the three central passages between atrium and narthex, on the other hand, were initially open and freely accessible (Figure 5.22).⁹⁹ One of the central questions regarding the Justinianic phase is whether there were only one or two narthices.¹⁰⁰ One of several arguments for only one narthex is the fact that the homogeneous masonry of the western wall of the central nave has no remains of former vaults of the proposed second (inner) narthex.¹⁰¹ Thus, from the only narthex of the Justinianic church one could directly enter the three-aisled interior. The western bay of the central nave was surmounted by a barrel vault, the eastern bay had a cupola.¹⁰² In the east, a three-parted

96 Hans Buchwald, "Criteria for the Evaluation of Transitional Byzantine Architecture," in Wolfram Hörandner et al. (eds.), *Festschrift Andrias Herbert Hunger zum 80. Geburtstag*, (Vienna: 1994), 21–31, 25–27; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 7–8.

97 For the architecture of the Hagia Eirene see George, *St. Eirene*; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*; Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 25–46.

98 For the fire destruction see Procopius, *De aedif.* I, 1, 20–22 and I, 2, 13; Procopius, *Wars*, ed. H. Dewing, 5 vols. (London 1914–28), I, 24, 9; Theophanes, 181.

99 Christine Strube, *Die westliche Eingangsseite der Kirchen von Konstantinopel in justinianischer Zeit*. (Wiesbaden: 1973), 108–110; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 134, 208–209; Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 28.

100 For only one narthex see Strube, *Westliche Eingangsseite*, 110; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 120, 208. For two narthices see Peter Grossmann, "Rezension zu Urs Peschlow, *Die Irenenkirche in Istanbul: Untersuchungen zur Architektur* (Tübingen: 1977)," *BZ* 73 (1980), 370–74.

101 Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 30–31.

102 Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 27–28, 97, 120, 208.



FIGURE 5.21 Groundplan of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople
S. FEIST (BASED UPON PESCHLOW, *IRENENKIRCHE*, BEILAGE 1, 10
AND MARCELL RESTLE, "KONSTANTINOPEL," *REALLEXIKON ZUR
BYZANTINISCHEN KUNST* 4 (1990): 366–737, ABB. 41)

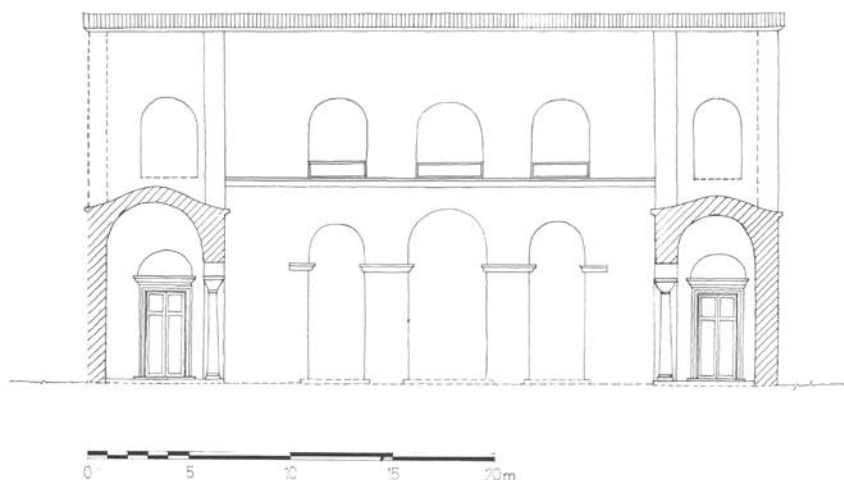


FIGURE 5.22 Reconstruction of the late antique narthex of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople
STRUBE, WESTLICHE EINGANGSSEITE, ABB. 45

presbytery with a Synthronon terminated the church. While the reconstruction of the ground floor of the Justinianic Hagia Eirene is largely assured, larger questions arise for its gallery floor and especially for the separation between the side galleries and the central nave. The common reconstructions transfer the solution of the ground floor with arcades also to the gallery level.¹⁰³ However, contemporary examples such as the neighbouring Hagia Sophia, the basilica of St John in Ephesus, the Panagia Katapoliani on Paros, and the church of Qasr Ibn Wardan contradict such a reconstruction.¹⁰⁴ Instead of a hermeneutic separation between side galleries and central nave, all these Justinianic examples focused on an open and light-flooded gallery level – especially in the east, in the cupola bays respectively.

The Justinianic Hagia Eirene was partially rebuilt at a later date. The reason for the rebuilding is mostly assumed to have been earthquake damage in 740;

103 George, *St. Eirene*, 75–76; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 119–120, 208; Grossmann, “Rezension”, 372–373.

104 For Hagia Sophia see Rowland Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (New York: 1988), 97–98, fig. 119a; for Ephesus see Andreas Thiel, *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden: 2005), 28–29, 32; for Paros see Harry Jewell and Frederick Hasluck, *The Church of Our Lady of the Hundred Gates (Panagia Hekatontapylani) in Paros* (London: 1920), 29–52; for Qasr Ibn Wardan see Howard Butler, *Early Churches in Syria: Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Princeton: 1929), 168–69.

the rebuilding itself is dated to the reign of Constantine V (741–775).¹⁰⁵ Despite this *communis opinio*, the earthquake scenario leaves urgent questions unanswered. First of all, the destruction of the church is mentioned in the Chronicle of Nikephoros I, but not in the chronicle of Theophanes Confessor.¹⁰⁶ It is therefore at least conceivable that Nikephoros, in his chronicle written at least 40 years later, tried to explain the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene retrospectively with the earthquake. Another argument against a comprehensive destruction is that there is no information of any serious damage in the 8th century to the neighbouring Hagia Sophia, about whose construction and repair measures we are unusually well informed.¹⁰⁷ Recent dendrochronological results even suggest that the rebuilding of the Hagia Eirene did not take place until the late 8th or early 9th century and therefore would not have been a direct consequence of the earthquake.¹⁰⁸ However, the fact that there was considerable reconstruction cannot be denied, as the Justinianic and the later phase can easily be distinguished from each other by the different masonry: the walls on the ground floor with greenstone and limestone date mainly from the 6th century, the walls on the gallery floor with layers of brick date from the rebuilding.¹⁰⁹

What did Hagia Eirene look like after its reconstruction? Overall, there seems to have been fewer changes compared to the church's late antique appearance than previously assumed. To the west, the church still had an atrium, which was surrounded by porticos. In contrast to late antiquity, however, the porticos were now at least partially destroyed and the passages between atrium and narthex could all be closed by doors (Figure 5.23).¹¹⁰ The narthex retained its late antique appearance entirely – including the aforementioned mosaics with geometric and vegetal decorations.¹¹¹ The church's interior still had three aisles, which were divided by columns with late

105 George, *St. Eirene*, 70; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 22.

106 Nikephoros, *History*, 63. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 412 merely speaks of the fact that numerous churches and monasteries collapsed as a result of the earthquake.

107 It has already been noted that Peschlow, "Hagia Sophia," suggests dating the partial renewal of the tympana walls to the 8th century.

108 Peter Ian Kuniholm et al., "Of Harbours and Trees: The Marmaray Contribution to a 2367-Year Oak-Tree-Ring Chronology from 97 Sites for the Aegean, East Mediterranean and Black Seas," in Paul Magdalino and Nina Ergin (eds.), *Istanbul and Water* (Leuven: 2015), 47–90, 62.

109 For the masonry see George, *St. Eirene*, 57–64; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 223 and catalogue of masonry.

110 For the porticos see Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 133–134; for the doors see Strube, *Westliche Eingangsseite*, 108–110; Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 134, 208–209.

111 Peschlow, *Irenenkirche*, 212–213.

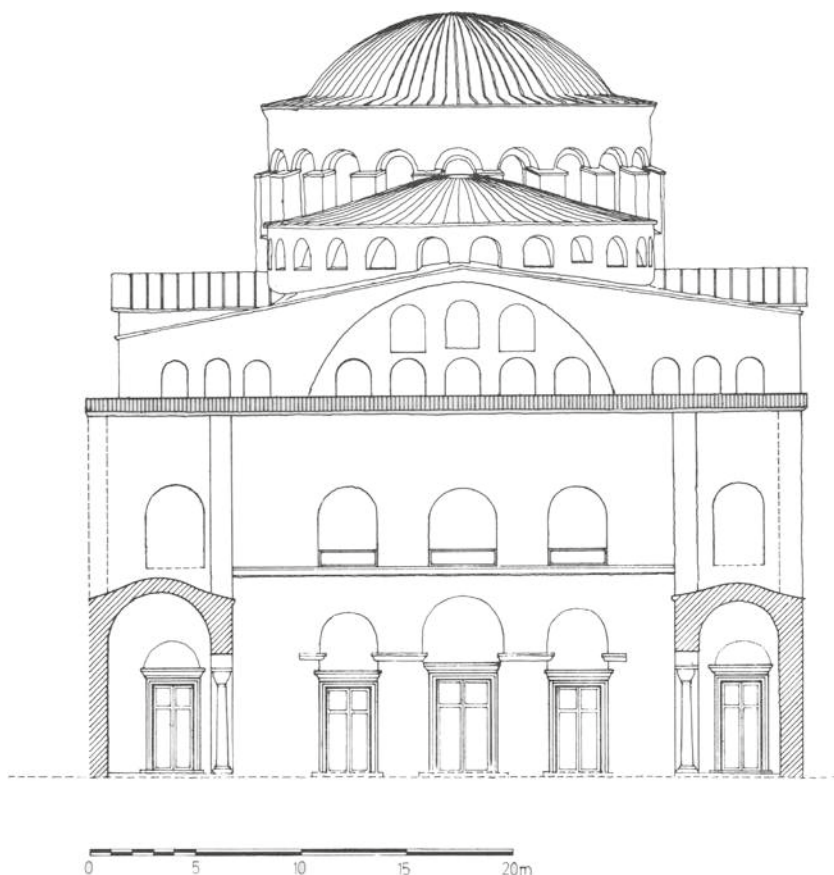


FIGURE 5.23 Reconstruction of the narthex of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople after its rebuilding
STRUBE, WESTLICHE EINGANGSSEITE, ABB. 56

antique monogram capitals (Figure 5.24). In the east a three-parted presbytery terminated the church, and the late antique Synthronon, which needed only few repairs, was preserved.¹¹² Thus, atrium, narthex, central nave, and aisles largely retained their late antique appearance; however, it is particularly noteworthy that the atrium was probably left at least partially ruined. Contrary to the ground floor, scholarship has regarded the rebuilding of the

¹¹² We have no knowledge of a possible templon screen. Perhaps the current fragmented slab underneath the columns of the northern arcades derives from a templon: Thilo Ulbert, "Untersuchungen zu den byzantinischen Reliefplatten des 6. bis 8. Jhs.," *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 19/20 (1969–70), 339–357, 349–350.



FIGURE 5.24 Interior of Hagia Eirene in Constantinople
 GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE (D-DAI-IST-73/36 (SECTION)
 (PHOTO: W. SCHIELE))

gallery floor as a much larger alteration compared to the first phase. There, the central nave, which is now vaulted by two cupolas, opens directly to both side galleries. The comparison with contemporary examples has shown that the Justinianic church already had a similar gallery floor and that the rebuilding must not have been as drastic as previously assumed. Instead, the open

and light-flooded spatial concept already known from the late antique church seems to have been merely intensified by the later reconstruction. Thus, after the rebuilding, Hagia Eirene retained as far as possible its late antique appearance with regard to architecture, liturgical and architectural sculptural furnishing. A novelty, however, was the apse mosaic with the monumental depiction of a cross.

Other churches distributed throughout the Byzantine Empire show close parallels to the rebuilding of the Hagia Eirene. One of these is the *Cumanın Camii in Antalya*, which served as Antalya's cathedral.¹¹³ In contrast to Hagia Eirene, the rebuilding of the Cumanın Camii not only had to deal with the older late antique church, but also with the antique Roman phase, because the place where the church is located had served as the forum in Roman times.¹¹⁴ At least two of the forum's buildings were preserved even after the first church was built. A stoa in the north of the church, of which the crepidoma and three pedestals are still persevered *in situ*, and a monopteros at the southwest corner of the church, whose pedestal is still *in situ* (Figure 5.25).¹¹⁵ Since most of the stoa's and the monopteros's building material was not used for the erection of the church, it can be assumed that parts of its architecture were at least partially maintained. The materials from other building of the forum, however, were reused for the east and west wall of the church.¹¹⁶ For this reason not only do the yellowish limestone blocks of the church and the two Roman forum buildings resemble each other, but also the architectural sculpture of stoa, monopteros, and the church's facades with their architrave blocks (Figure 5.26). The reuse of building materials and architectural sculpture thus created a homogenous impression of antique and late antique buildings. Especially on the west side of the church – its main entrance – the church between the two older buildings could present itself as an integral part of the central square. After entering the church from the west, one first passed the narthex – the reused Roman architrave blocks were also present there – before reaching the naos. The naos was cruciform and was probably surmounted by a wooden tent

113 For the architecture of the Cumanın Camii see Gamze Kaymak, *Die Cumanın Camii in Antalya* (Antalya: 2009); Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 47–60. Another example in which a late antique church was similarly rebuilt during the Iconoclast period is the aforementioned Lower City Church in Amorium (Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 60–70).

114 For the forum see Hansgerd Hellenkemper and Friedrich Hild, "Lykien und Pamphylien," *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 8 (Vienna: 2004), 319, 326.

115 Kaymak, *Cumanın Camii*, 78–89. There is no evidence of any practical use of stoa and monopteros in late antiquity.

116 For the building material of the church see Kaymak, *Cumanın Camii*, 20–21, 35–36.

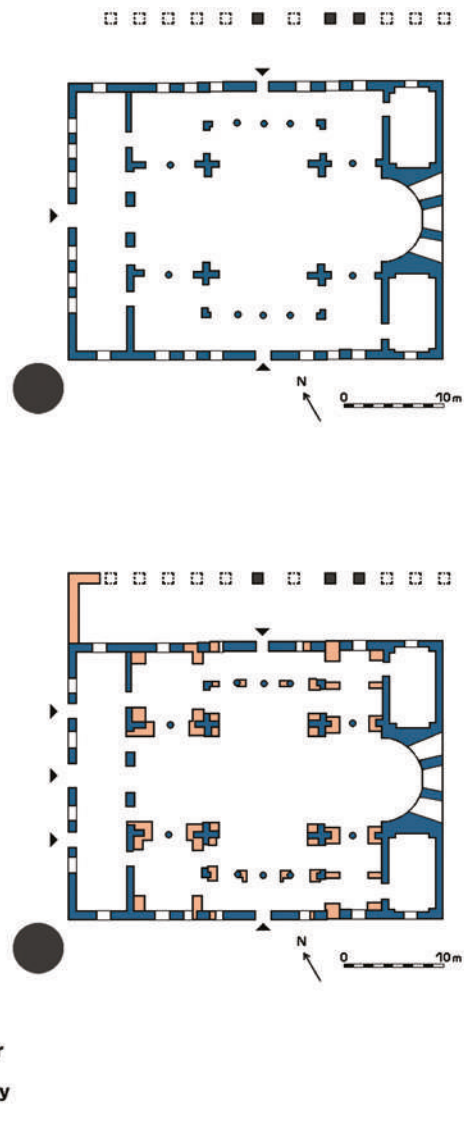


FIGURE 5.25 Groundplan of the Cumanin Camii in Antalya
S. FEIST (BASED UPON KAYMAK, *CUMANIN CAMII*, ABB. 179, 285, 286, 304)

roof or a tent cupola in late antiquity.¹¹⁷ In the east, an embedded three-parted presbytery terminated the church. The architrave blocks seen in the stoa and

¹¹⁷ For wooden roofs compare the East Church of Alahan Manastir from the 5th or 6th century, the domed church (Zenon church) in Meriamlik from the 5th century, and the



FIGURE 5.26 Southern Spolia portal of the Cumanin Camii in Antalya
S. FEIST

monopteros as well as from the church's facades and its narthex were used again in the naos (Figure 5.27). For their usage as pillar-capitals, however, the blocks were not only shortened to a suitable size, but also reworked. Besides the older and reworked pillar capitals, other capitals were of late antique origin. These include the Corinthian capitals between the lateral crossarms and the aisles as well as the pilaster capitals in the eastern crossarm.¹¹⁸

For the later rebuilding of the Cumanin Camii neither cause nor time are known.¹¹⁹ All attempts to explain the rebuilding by an earlier destruction by

ambulatory church in Dağ Pazarı from the 5th century. See *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 4 (1990), s.v. "Kommagene-Kilikien-Isaurien" (Hansgerd Hellenkemper, Friedrich Hild, and Gisela Hellenkemper-Salies): 182–356, 237–238, 257–267.

118 Martin Dennert, *Mittelbyzantinische Kapitelle: Studien zu Typologie und Chronologie* (Bonn: 1997), 11–13.

119 For the interpretation that the rebuilding was carried out in only one phase (and not in two different phases, as suggested by Kaymak) see Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 58–59, n. 284.



FIGURE 5.27 Reworked pillar capital (right) and late antique pilaster capital (left) in the Cumanın Camii in Antalya
 GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE (D-DAI-IST-R 7295 (SECTION)
 (PHOTO: U. PESCHLOW))

earthquakes or hostile attacks only led to an approximate dating between the 8th and the 10th century.¹²⁰ Also after the rebuilding the church was flanked in the west by stoa and monopteros. The stoa was probable ruinous, since several pedestals were used for the rebuilding of the church; however, at least the still visible crepidoma and the three pedestals must have

120 8th century: Vincenzo Ruggieri, *Byzantine Religious Architecture (582–867). Its History and Structural Elements* (Rome: 1991), 240; Kaymak, *Cumanın Camii*, 70. 9th century: Michael H. Ballance, “Cumanın Cami’i at Antalya: A Byzantine Church,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 23 (1955), 99–114, 114. 10th century: Kaymak, *Cumanın Camii*, 70.

been preserved.¹²¹ Very little, if any, building material was used from the monopteros. Instead, the temple seems to have been involved in the rebuilding, as it received a staircase at that time.¹²² Since no changes were made to the church's facades during the rebuilding, the late antique church and the Roman buildings of the forum could present themselves as a homogenous ensemble – despite the partially ruined stoa. Like the facades, the narthex remained almost unaffected by the rebuilding. Major changes, however, were carried out in the naos. There, especially columns and pillars were enormously reinforced what suggests that a cupola of stone or brick material now surmounted the naos.¹²³ It is particularly noteworthy that the naos' architectural sculpture – both the reworked roman architrave blocks and the late antique capitals – remained intact and visible, although some of them now lacked any static function. Also the liturgical furnishing seems to have been used after the rebuilding, since none of the preserved fragments can be dated to the Iconoclast era. Only in the Middle Ages, when the church was rebuilt into a basilica, were the late antique furnishings no longer used, and new pieces were made.¹²⁴

While both the rebuilt Hagia Eirene and Cumanin Camii retained much of their late antique predecessors – including their size – the rebuilding of other churches during the Iconoclast era did lead to major interventions. One example is the *Church of St Mary in Ephesus*.¹²⁵ This building, which in antiquity, late antiquity, and Byzantine times was located in the immediate vicinity of the city's harbour, had, like the Cumanin Camii, an ancient predecessor, the southern stoa of the Hadrianic Olympieion, whose function has not been clarified (Figure 5.28).¹²⁶ In late antiquity, the Church of St Mary was built in the area of the stoa and this first church is commonly interpreted as the venue of the third ecumenical Council in 431 and as the first Ephesian cathedral.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Kaymak, *Cumanin Camii*, 42, n. 189.

¹²² Kaymak, *Cumanin Camii*, 44.

¹²³ Kaymak, *Cumanin Camii*, 44.

¹²⁴ For the medieval phase of the church see Kaymak, *Cumanin Camii*, 49–53.

¹²⁵ Josef Keil, Fritz Knoll, and Emil Reisch, *Die Marienkirche in Ephesos* (Vienna: 1932); Stefan Karwiese, *Erster vorläufiger Gesamtbericht über die Wiederaufnahme der archäologischen Untersuchung der Marienkirche in Ephesos* (Vienna: 1989); Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 74–91; Nikolaos D. Karydis, "The Development of the Church of St Mary at Ephesos from Late Antiquity to the Dark Ages," *Anatolian Studies* 68 (2019), 175–194. Another similar example is the church of St Nicholas in Myra (Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 91–105).

¹²⁶ Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 16–26; Karwiese, *Marienkirche*, 11–16.

¹²⁷ Sabine Ladstätter and Andreas Pülz, "Ephesus in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Period: Changes in its Urban Character from the Third to the Seventh Century AD,"



FIGURE 5.28 Aerial photograph of St Mary in Ephesus
ÖAW-ÖAI

The late antique church extended in the western half of the stoa and could be reached via an atrium in the west. Both the Roman era entrance to the south and the apsis in the west, atypical of atria, were preserved.¹²⁸ In contrast to the atrium, the narthex was almost completely newly built.¹²⁹ From the narthex one reached the church's interior, which was divided into a central nave and two aisles by columns. Both the composite capitals and the architrave blocks resting on the columns were of roman origin and probably belonged to the stoa.¹³⁰ In the east, an embedded three-parted presbytery with synthronon and cathedra terminated the church.¹³¹ The baptistery in the north of the atrium and the rooms in the east of the presbytery were probably built at the same time as the basilica; the rooms to the east are commonly interpreted as the bishop's palace.¹³²

The first Church of St Mary was subsequently rebuilt (Figure 5.29). In contrast to late antiquity, the western half of the former stoa was no longer retained as a structural unit, but divided into two parts. In the west of the church, however, this change did not become noticeable at first sight. There the church could still be reached via the atrium, in which, among other things,

in Andrew Poulter (ed.), *The Transition to Late Antiquity on the Danube and Beyond* (New York: 2007), 391–433, 411–412; Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 76–78.

128 Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 39, 41–42.

129 Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 27–28, 37–38.

130 Eugenio Russo, *Sulla cronologia del S. Giovanni e di altri monumenti paleocristiani de Efeso* (Vienna: 2010): 91–92.

131 Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 28–30.

132 For the baptistery see Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 6–7, 43–50; Russo, *Efeso*, 68–78; Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 82–83. For the palace see Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 5, 11–12, 77–78; Sabine Ladstätter, “Ephesus,” in *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia: From the End of Late Antiquity until the Coming of the Turks*, ed. Philipp Niewöhner (Oxford: 2017): 238–48, 240–241; Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 83.

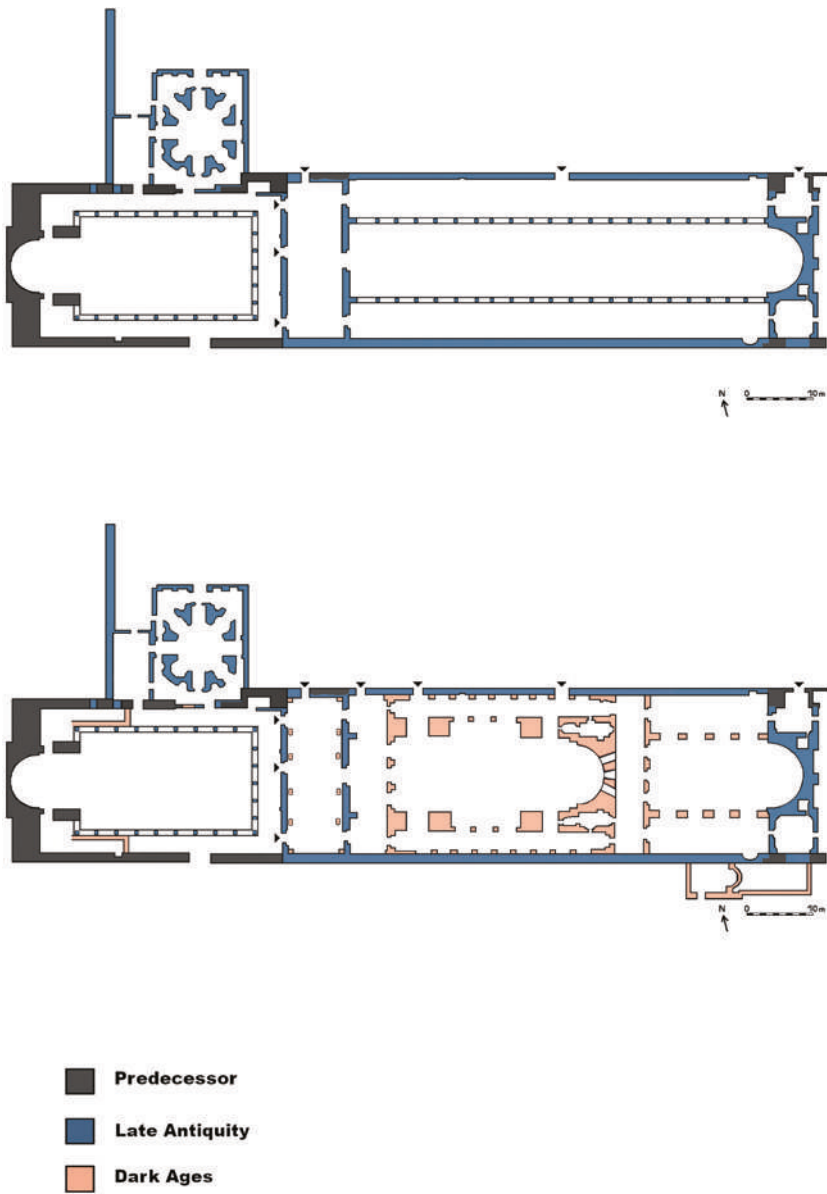


FIGURE 5.29 Groundplan of St Mary in Ephesus
S. FEIST (BASED UPON KEIL, KNOLL, AND REICH, *MARIENKIRCHE*, ABB. 21, 56, 75 AND FURIO FASOLO, "LA BASILICA DI CONCILIO DI EFESO," *PALLADIO* 6 (1956): 1–30, FIG. 12)

the unusual western apse was preserved. The late antique narthex was also maintained, but in the course of the rebuilding it became the exonarthex of the church.¹³³ Furthermore, four double columns and two pillars were added in the interior of the exonarthex. The heterogeneity of the architectural sculpture suggests that it was reused; the ionic capitals seem to date from the 3rd or 4th century.¹³⁴ After the rebuilding of the church, the exonarthex was followed by an esonarthex, the lintels of which were probably of late antique origin.¹³⁵ Contrary to the aforementioned Hagia Eirene and the Cumanin Camii, the interior of the Church of St Mary was fundamentally changed by the rebuilding. Henceforth huge pillars divided the former central nave into a cruciform naos, which was surmounted by a cupola (Figure 5.30).¹³⁶ On both sides of the naos extended the aisles, whose walls received pilasters during the rebuilding and which had a gallery floor.¹³⁷ A newly built three-parted presbytery terminated this domed church in the east. Due to the lack of liturgical furnishing, which could be dated to the Iconoclast period, the late antique pieces may have continued to be used even after the rebuilding.

As already mentioned, the rebuilt Church of St Mary did not maintain the previous basilica as a structural unit, but divided it into two parts. While the domed church extended in the west, a pillar-basilica with narthex, three aisles, and a three-parted presbytery followed in the east; the latter was preserved from the late antique predecessor church.¹³⁸

As in the case of the Cumanin Camii and to a certain extent also of the Hagia Eirene, neither cause nor date of the rebuilding have been clarified for the Church of St Mary. First, it should be noted that the domed church and the pillar basilica were certainly built at the same time on the basis of the architectural evidence.¹³⁹ Second, it must be stressed that the dating of the rebuilding must remain hypothetical due to the lack of archaeological evidence.

¹³³ Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 51.

¹³⁴ Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 58; Orhan Bingöl, *Das ionische Normalkapitell in hellenistischer und römischer Zeit in Kleinasien* (Tübingen: 1980): 38–39.

¹³⁵ Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 52; Angelica Degasperì, *Die Marienkirche in Ephesos: Die Bauskulptur aus frühchristlicher und byzantinischer Zeit* (Vienna: 2013), 37–38, 47, cat.-no. 165.

¹³⁶ Keil, Knoll, and Reisch, *Marienkirche*, 51, 61; Nikolaos Karydis, *Early Byzantine Vaulted Construction in Churches of the Western Coastal Plains and River Valleys of Asia Minor* (Oxford: 2011), 150–152.

¹³⁷ Karydis, *Byzantine Vaulted*, 151, n. 464.

¹³⁸ For the pillar-basilica see Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 87–88.

¹³⁹ Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 89–90.

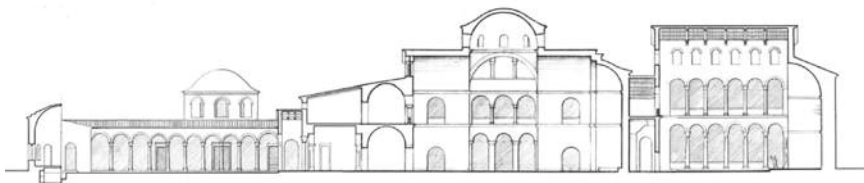


FIGURE 5.30 Reconstruction of St Mary in Ephesus after its rebuilding

KARYDIS, "ST MARY," FIG. 19

Nevertheless, there are a few indications that can at least limit the possible period of the rebuilding. These include, for example, the fact that neither the Anglo-Saxon traveller Willibald around 720 nor Constantine VI in 795 visited the former Ephesian cathedral and that the Church of St Mary therefore probably played a rather subordinated role in the city's religious topography throughout the 8th century.¹⁴⁰ From the middle Byzantine period, however, there are so many fragments of chancel slabs, architraves, and the like that a comprehensive renewal of the church's furnishing must have taken place during this period.¹⁴¹ In middle Byzantine times also the church was fundamentally changed and the domed church was no longer used in an ecclesiastical manner; instead, it only served as a kind of a vestibule for the eastern basilica.¹⁴² Between the 8th century, during which the Church of St Mary seems to have largely fallen into ruin, and the renewal of the church's furnishing in middle Byzantine times, the former cathedral must have regained its importance. One reason for this may have been the fate of the Ephesian Church of St John. In the 7th century the Church of St John had taken over the function as cathedral from the Church of St Mary, but in 867/68 it was desecrated by the Paulicians and subsequently used as a stable.¹⁴³ Perhaps the rebuilding of the Church of St Mary was a consequence of the destruction of the Church of St John and the first Ephesian cathedral was used again in its old function in the second half of the 9th century – but now in an altered and renewed architecture.

140 Andreas Külzer, "Ephesos in byzantinischer Zeit: Ein historischer Überblick", in Falko Daim and Jörg Drauschke (eds.), *Byzanz: Das Römerreich im Mittelalter*, vol. 2 (2): Schauplätze (Mainz: 2010): 521–539, 525.

141 For middle Byzantine architectural and liturgical sculpture see Degasperri, *Marienkirche*, 52–60, cat. nos. 116–120, 128–129.

142 Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 89, n. 502.

143 Clive Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity. A Late Antique, Byzantine, and Turkish City* (Cambridge: 1979), 105; Karwiese, *Marienkirche*, 26; Külzer, *Ephesos*, 525.

In contrast to the previous churches, the last example presented here – the *Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki*, of which the decoration programme has already been mentioned – was completely rebuilt during the period under discussion.¹⁴⁴ The Iconoclast era church had two late antique predecessors: the three-aisled Basilica (A), along which was probably built the neighbouring baptistery, and the much larger five-aisled Basilica (B).¹⁴⁵ Basilica (B) could be reached from the west via an atrium (Figure 5.31). There were one or two narthices and the church's aisles were separated by columns with Corinthian capitals. To the east, the central nave led into a central apse. Basilica (B) was about 115 m long and 53 m wide and thus the largest known church in late antique Thessaloniki, which is why it is mostly identified as the city's cathedral.¹⁴⁶

While nothing remained of Basilica (A) above ground, Basilica (B) had a significant influence on the new construction of the church during the Iconoclast period. Most noticeably, about 70 cm west of today's church remains of the walls of Basilica (B) are still visible just above ground level (Figure 5.32). Another less obvious impact of the older basilica on the construction of the new church was that the aisles of the new church stretch to a width similar to that of the inner aisles of the older basilica and its central nave determined the width of the naos.¹⁴⁷ In order to avoid contact between the older stylobates and the new church, there were relief arches on the east facades of the new church and the accesses to the Parabemata were moved out of the room's axis.¹⁴⁸ In addition, two openings were left free for the older Stylobate on the west facade of today's church.¹⁴⁹ The same openings, however, were the only connections between the old basilica and the new church, because it was exactly here that

144 For the architecture see Marinos G. Kalligas, *Die Hagia Sophia von Thessalonike* (Würzburg: 1935); Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*; Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 109–128. A similar example is the Hagia Sophia in Vize (Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 128–145).

145 For Basilica (A) see Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 9–10; Evangelia Hadjitryphonos, “Η εικόνα, το περιεχόμενο και οι επεμβάσεις στο χώρο γύρω από την Αγία Σοφία Θεσσαλονίκης,” *Μνημείο και περιβάλλον* 5 (1998–99), 97–129, 104–106; Aristoteles Mentzos, “Santa Sofia di Salonicco: Il problema della prima fase,” in Raffaella Farioli Campanati (ed.), *Ideologia e cultura artistica tra Adriatico e Mediterraneo orientale (IV–X secolo)* (Bologna: 2009), 87–98, 87. For the baptistery see Hadjitryphonos, *Αγία Σοφία*, 102–109. For Basilica (B) see Aristoteles Mentzos, “Συμβολή στην έρευνα του αρχαιότερου ναού της Αγίας Σοφίας Θεσσαλονίκης,” *Μακεδονικά. Σύγγραμμα Περιοδικόν της Εταιρείας Μακεδονικών Σπουδών* 21 (1981), 201–221; Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 10–13.

146 Mentzos, *Santa Sofia*, 87.

147 Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 10–12.

148 Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 10, 24.

149 Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 20, 64.

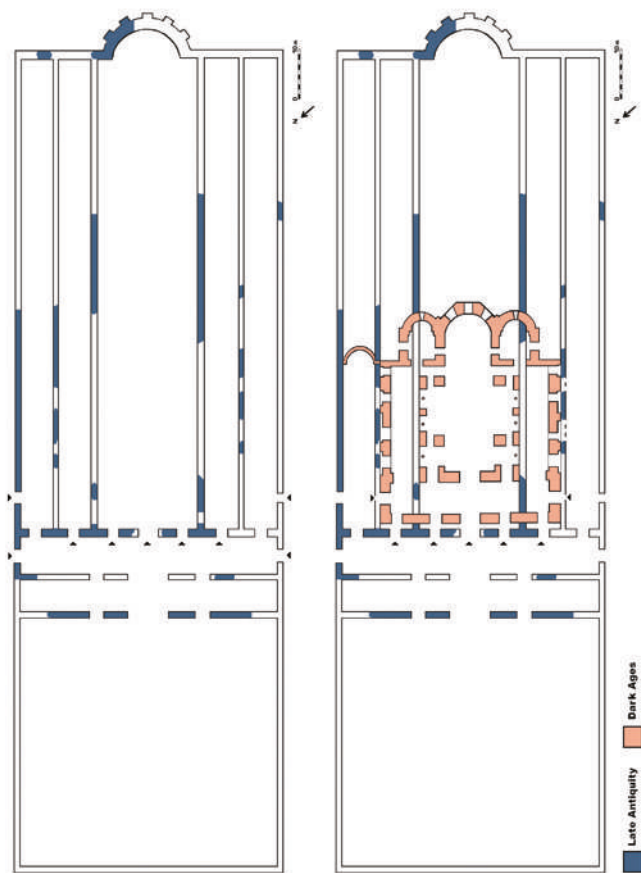


FIGURE 5.31 Groundplan of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki
 S. FEIST (BASED UPON THEOHARIDOU, *HAGIA SOPHIA*, FIG. 2, PL. I AND
 HADJITRYPHONOS, *ΑΓΙΑ ΣΟΦΙΑ*, ΕΙΚ. 3Β)

the narthex of the old basilica was connected to the *ex novo* erected church.¹⁵⁰ The continued use of the likewise preserved late antique atrium and the inclusion of the older narthex must have made the new church's appearance largely

¹⁵⁰ Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 64–68. For the integration of the old narthex several conflicts were accepted, such as the 70cm wide distance between the old and the new structure or the non-uniform floor level in the gallery zone. Nevertheless, in addition to the architecture, iconographic and hagiographic evidence also speaks for the persistence of the older narthex (Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 116–120).



FIGURE 5.32 Remains of the late antique Basilica B of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki
U. PESCHLOW

unchanged from the west, the side of the main entrance. It was only after these older structures had been passed through that the new church could be entered. There, one first reached the narthex, which formed together with the aisles an ambulatory around the naos and had a gallery zone. Arcades with late antique capitals divided ambulatory and naos from each other (Figure 5.33). The naos was surmounted by a cupola, whose mosaic with Christ's Ascension has already been discussed (Figure 5.34). Also already examined is the mosaic decoration of the three-parted presbytery, which terminated the church in the east.

While it has already been shown that the erection of the new domed church can probably be dated to the late 8th century on the basis of the monograms in the bema mosaic, the reasons for the construction of the new church still have to be investigated. As in the majority of the reconstructions and new erections of late antique churches during the Iconoclast era, the older Hagia Sophia is usually postulated to have been destroyed by an earthquake.¹⁵¹ However, the fact that parts of Basilica (B) must still have been in such good condition that they could be integrated into the new domed church speaks against a comprehensive destruction. This applies not only to the late antique

¹⁵¹ Mentzos, *Συμβολή*, 220–221; Theoharidou, *Hagia Sophia*, 155–157.

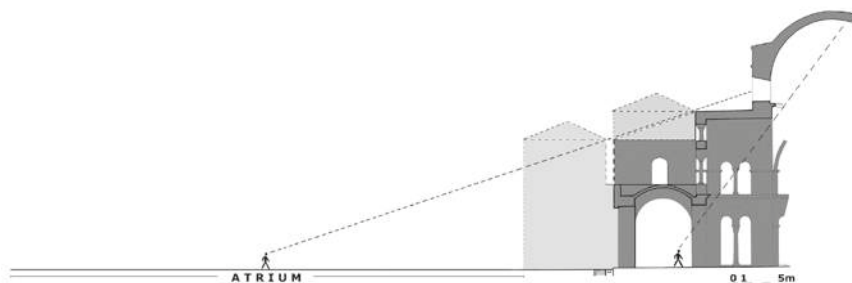


FIGURE 5.33 Integration of the late antique narthex into the rebuilt Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki
S. FEIST (BASED UPON THEOHARIDOU, *HAGIA SOPHIA*, FIGS. 24, 26, 28)



FIGURE 5.34 Interior of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki
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narthex, but also to the architectural sculpture, which presumably originated from the predecessor church and continued to be used in the new church. There is another aspect of an economic nature that has not yet been taken into account: it is known that the maintenance of large wooden roofs was extremely time-consuming and costly.¹⁵² Maybe for this reason, the decision

¹⁵² The evidence mainly derives from the basilicas of Rome, on which the *Liber Pontificalis* reports. See Franz Alto Bauer, *Das Bild der Stadt Rom im Frühmittelalter: Papststiftungen im Spiegel des Liber Pontificalis von Gregor dem Dritten bis zu Leo dem Dritten* (Wiesbaden: 2004), 188–189.

was made against the older basilica and instead a new architecture was chosen. At least, the wood resources of the Byzantine Empire declined rapidly in the course of late antiquity and reforestation did not begin until the 6th or 7th century.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the competition of Hagios Demetrios may have played a role in the, certainly manifold, circumstances. Although the Hagia Sophia was the city's cathedral, it could not keep up with the large pilgrim church.¹⁵⁴ With both churches, with their five aisles and size, being very similar before the Iconoclast era, the decision to adopt a new architecture at the Hagia Sophia may have been an attempt to stand out from the overshadowing pilgrim church.¹⁵⁵

The survey of some of the key monuments has shown that despite all differences, the reconstruction of older churches and new erections during the Iconoclast era had several characteristics in common. These include the fact that the late antique predecessors were not usually utterly destroyed. Whatever the state of remains, the decision was often taken not to employ the older basilical form but rather to adopt a new one. At the same time, both the rebuilding and new construction were hardly noticeable in the churches' exterior and their narthices, as the new domed churches were still committed to their late antique appearance in these parts. It is particularly remarkable that the new domes, the decisive distinguishing feature between the old and new churches, could only be seen at a distance, and not in the immediate vicinity of the new churches.¹⁵⁶ Only after one had strode from outside to inside, from old to new, from profane to sacral, did the new cupola reveal itself inside the naos. There one was welcomed by a pictorial decoration programme unknown in late antiquity, which was not only a reflection of the celestial hierarchy, but also assigned the beholder a place in it. Nevertheless, reminiscences of the predecessor building were also found in the naos, whether in form of architectural sculpture or liturgical furnishing.

153 Johannes Koder, *Der Lebensraum der Byzantiner: Historisch-geographischer Abriß ihres mittelalterlichen Staates im östlichen Mittelmeerraum* (Graz: 1984), 51–54; Johannes Koder, "Historical Geography," in Niewöhner, *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia*, 9–27, 19 (both with further references).

154 The competition between both churches is most evident in the *Miraculi Sancti Demetrii*, ed. Paul Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de S. Démétrius et de la pénétration des Slavs dans les Balkans I: le texte* (Paris: 1979). See Franz Alto Bauer, *Eine Stadt und ihr Patron: Thessaloniki und der Heilige Demetrios* (Regensburg: 2013), 144–145.

155 For the architecture of Hagios Demetrios see Bauer, *Thessaloniki*, 63–141.

156 Feist, *Dunkle Jahrhunderte*, 151–153.

This survey of the material culture of Byzantine iconoclasm has shown that the negative connotations associated with this era are largely unjustified. It can be shown that the Iconoclast period was not a time without images. Instead, the cross-genre examination testified that not only were several existing pictures retained, but also new ones were produced – this applied to both non-religious and religious images. The example of the small *sekreton* in the metropolitan Hagia Sophia has shown that in cases where older pictures were replaced, this did not happen immediately after the beginning of Byzantine iconoclasm, and then was also often undertaken in the course of other restoration works. In addition, the small *sekreton* together with the Koimesis Church from Nicaea suggests that religious images, if any, were substituted mainly by depictions of crosses. It must be stressed, however, that the depiction of crosses played a major role even before the Iconoclast era. Evidence of this can be found in the presumably aniconic decoration of the metropolitan Hagia Sophia, in which there were numerous images of crosses, or in the significance of the cross for the coinage.¹⁵⁷ Also the depiction of monumental crosses was by no means banned from the pictorial decoration programme immediately after the defeat of iconoclasm, as the longevity of the apse mosaics of the Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki and especially of the Hagia Eirene in Constantinople shows.

The assumption that the Iconoclast epoch does not satisfactorily fill the lacuna between late antiquity and the Middle Ages can also be rejected. Instead, the investigation of the modification and reconstruction of older churches during the period shows that they were far more committed to their late antique predecessors than has long be assumed. The exterior and the narthices of the churches still reflected the late antique appearance and both the new architecture and pictorial decoration programme only revealed themselves when entering the churches' interior. With the cupola and the pictorial

¹⁵⁷ For the Hagia Sophia see Photios, *Homil.*, ed. B. Laourdas (Thessalonica: 1957), xvii, 2–6. For the aniconic decoration programme of the Hagia Sophia, with special consideration of the subsequently erected southern vestibule, whose images were strongly related to the Justinianic decoration, see Philipp Niewöhner and Natalia Teteriatnikov, "The South Vestibule of Hagia Sophia at Istanbul: The Ornamental Mosaics and the Private Door of the Patriarchate," *DOP* 68 (2014), 117–156, 125–136, with further examples for aniconic decoration from the time before the Iconoclast era, 136–144. For the coinage see Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness. On the Limits of Representation in the Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: 2002), 88–90.

decoration programme, the foundations were laid for later developments in middle and late Byzantine times. As an interface between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, the importance of the Iconoclast era can therefore hardly be overestimated.

PART 3

Byzantine Iconoclasm in Action



First Iconoclasm, ca. 700–780

Mike Humphreys

This chapter aims to critically present the main events of the first phase of Byzantine iconoclasm, examining the key evidence regarding what was destroyed, who was persecuted, by whom, and why. As Part 2 of this *Companion* has amply demonstrated, this is a difficult task. Not only are our sources limited, but our texts are nearly all written by iconophiles, often much later, and in a highly polemical manner. Indeed, recent revisionists argue that our sources go beyond the sort of distortion normal in medieval history into the realms of myth-creation, inventing a grand narrative of destruction and persecution.¹

How one approaches this source problem fundamentally impacts how one sees iconoclasm. The more credence given, the more First Iconoclasm seems a major controversy, full of destruction, persecution, and resistance. The more doubt cast, the more episodic and epiphenomenal it becomes. Debate has also raged over whether Byzantine iconoclasm primarily arose due to internal or external factors.² Furthermore, some view First Iconoclasm as essentially an imperial heresy driven by Leo III and Constantine V, others downplay the role of the emperors or at least Leo.³

While scholars dispute nearly everything, all agree that the controversy first emerged in some form during the reign of Leo III (717–41). Therefore, we shall begin by exploring the general circumstances of Leo's reign before iconoclasm, noting evidence that is especially pertinent to what was to come.

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- 1 This is the principal point of Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Bristol: 2012). This is a concise summary of the, more cautious, Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era: A History* (Cambridge: 2011). This in turn is highly influenced by the various works of Marie-France Auzépy, and especially Paul Speck.
 - 2 For a summary and critique of possible external factors see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 105–117.
 - 3 For iconoclasm as an imperial heresy, see Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III* (Louvain: 1973), and *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V* (Louvain: 1977). For a total denial of Leo III's involvement, see Brubaker, *Inventing*, 27–29.

1 The Reign of Leo III before Iconoclasm

Leo became emperor in 717 with Byzantium on the verge of annihilation.⁴ After decades of defeat, an Arab army was about to besiege Constantinople. The inability to arrest the Arab advance had caused, and been facilitated by, political turmoil, with seven changes of emperor since 695. Leo had no claim to the throne beyond his credentials as a general. Fortunately, he proved an astute choice, winning the first major victory against the Arabs in decades. Indeed, some sources claim there were 150,000 Muslim casualties, numbers that, while grossly inflated, reflect the enormity of the defeat.⁵

Understandably, such a victory gave Leo and his fledgling Isaurian dynasty significant legitimacy. Even the usually hostile *Short History* of Nikephoros and *Chronicle* of Theophanes cannot ignore it, nor deny Leo some of the credit, though Theophanes in particular tries to shift the focus to divine intercession by the Virgin.⁶ Likewise a homily ascribed to the Patriarch Germanos lauded Mary for the deliverance of Constantinople, not mentioning Leo at all.⁷

A very different account survives in the Armenian sources. Łewond, traditionally dated to the late 8th century, has Leo leading the defence after the manner of Old Testament kings, ordering prayers, quoting the Psalms, and declaring his faith in Christ. This culminated in Leo personally carrying a cross in a procession down to the Bosphorus and striking the water. As a result:

the power of the holy cross ... immediately shook the depths of the sea, and consequently the high waves swarmed vehemently, causing a terrible shipwreck among Arab troops, most of which drowned in the sea and became subject to the same punishment and wrath as were the Pharaoh's troops.⁸

4 See Michael Angold, "The Byzantine Political Process at Crisis Point," in Paul Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (Abingdon: 2010), 5–21. For the general period of anarchy and its role in generating iconoclasm, see Judith Herrin, "The Context of Iconoclast Reform," in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham: 1977), 15–20.

5 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 75.

6 Nikephoros, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Washington, DC: 1990), 54; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. Carolus de Boor, 2 vols (Leipzig: 1883–85), trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: 1997), 386–98.

7 Venance Grumel, "Homélie de saint Germain sur la délivrance de Constantinople," *REB* 16 (1958), 188–205.

8 Łewond, *History*, ed. G. Chahnazarian, *Histoire des guerres et des conquêtes des Arabes par l'éminent Ghéwond* (Paris: 1856), 20; trans. Zaven Arzoumanian, *History of Łewond* (Philadelphia: 1982), 112.

This very positive story probably originated in now lost pro-Leo Byzantine sources.⁹ Three themes stand out. First, Leo is the pious hero. Second, the cross is central to the narrative. Finally, the story is interlaced with Old Testament allusions, with Leo compared to Moses, David, and Hezekiah. As we shall see, these themes will frequently recur.

Lewond also purports to preserve a letter exchange between Leo III and Caliph Umar II (717–20). Much scholarly ink has been spilt over these “letters.”¹⁰ Most are sceptical about their genuineness, preferring to read them as creations of later Christian-Muslim debate. Certainly, some passages make better sense if composed in the late 8th or early 9th centuries. However, Greenwood cogently argues that the most plausible explanation for the letters’ genesis is an actual exchange, and even if what we possess contains later accretions there remains an early 8th-century core.¹¹ The best evidence for this is the argument espoused. The letter vigorously defends Christianity’s core tenets and contemporary practices, especially in the areas most disputed by Islam. It is in this context that it supports the veneration of the cross and, much less forthrightly, images. Comparing images with the cross, it declares:

As for pictures, we do not pay them like respect, not having received any commandment to that effect in the Holy Scriptures. We have, however, in the Old Testament the divine command which authorized Moses to have the figures of the Cherubim in the tabernacle as witnesses. Likewise we, animated by a sincere love for the disciples of the Lord, and burned with love for the incarnate Lord Himself, have always felt a desire to conserve their images, which have come down to us from their times as their living representation. Having them in front of us, we joyfully glorify God who has saved us by the intercession of his only-begotten Son, who appeared in the world in a similar figure, and who has glorified the saints. But as for the wood and the colours on it, we do not give them any reverence.¹²

This is an argument for a mild form of iconophilia, but from the emperor who supposedly instituted iconoclasm. That such a thing could be put into Leo’s mouth from the late 8th century onwards, when iconophiles were busily condemning him as an iconoclast heretic, stretches belief. Moreover, this passage

9 Gero, *Leo*, 36–43.

10 For a detailed overview of the debate see Timothy Greenwood, “A Reassessment of the History of Lewond,” *Le Muséon* 125 (2012), 99–167.

11 Greenwood, “Lewond,” 154–64.

12 Lewond, *History*, 14; trans. Arzoumanian, 99–100.

is a minor part of a much longer letter, which makes sense if written when religious imagery was a smaller part of a larger argument about venerating the holy, rather than the prominent theme it would become thanks to the iconoclast controversy.¹³

If part of this letter does reflect a message that Leo espoused in his early reign, what can it tell us? First, Leo presented himself as the defender of Christianity, his words mirroring his deeds in defending Constantinople. Second, there was some knowledge of Islam and its main points of difference with Christianity. This included condemning as idolatry the veneration of relics, the cross, and images of saints. While Leo offered a full-throated defence of relics and the cross, images were merely permissible. The letter is drenched in citations from Scripture, especially the Old Testament, and contains a strident anti-idolatry message.

We are on firmer ground for the next significant moment, for in 720 Leo crowned his two-year-old son Constantine V as co-emperor. To mark the establishment of a dynasty Leo made several important changes to the coinage and imperial seals. Most strikingly, Leo introduced a new silver coin called the *miliaresion*.¹⁴ In its aniconic design, the *miliaresion* clearly aped the Islamic *dirham*. Indeed, it was on occasion struck over *dirhams*.¹⁵ However, instead of Quranic verses, the *miliaresion* proclaimed: "O Leo and Constantine, emperors by [the grace of] God." Even more strikingly it had a cross surrounded by the legend: "Jesus Christ Conquers." Likewise, Leo broke with two centuries of tradition by removing a depiction of the Virgin from imperial seals, replacing it with a cross.¹⁶ These changes were significant. However, despite the preference for aniconic imagery, and the removal of a religious figural image from the seals, there is nothing innately "iconoclast" here. Indeed, future iconophile emperors maintained the design of the *miliaresion* largely unaltered for centuries. Rather, Leo continued the themes of the cross and imperial victory encountered in Lewond, while entwining them with dynasty.

This fits the context. Leo had no familial claim to the throne and faced considerable resistance to his rule in his early reign.¹⁷ He needed to continually reaffirm his and his dynasty's legitimacy. The most obvious route to do so was to lean into his victory over the Arabs. This innately had a religious aspect, but one made more pointed by the embrace of the cross. After all, not only was the

13 John Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," *DOP* 18 (1964), 113–32, 126–27.

14 *DOC* 3.1, 227, 231–2, 251–53.

15 See Figure 5.9 in Chapter 5.

16 *DOSeals* 6.28–31.

17 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 75–79.

cross the premier symbol of Christianity, it unavoidably pointed to the principal difference between Islam and Christianity, the divinity of Christ. The cross was the most objectionable symbol to Islam, and indeed was under attack in the contemporary Caliphate.¹⁸ Moreover, the cross had long been associated with imperial victory, and Leo may well have been reinforcing such links by naming his child Constantine. After all, Constantine I was the first Christian emperor, who had seen a heavenly vision of the cross with the attached slogan *En toutō nika*—"by this sign conquer"—a slogan notably similar to that on the *miliaresion*, and whose mother had discovered the True Cross.¹⁹ The connections between the cross and imperial victory had only deepened when Heraclius had rescued the True Cross from the Persians, with the relic, or the principal portion of it, then kept in the imperial palace.

Leo's next move to ensure divine favour and deepen his reputation as Christianity's defender was to forcibly convert the Jews and Montanists in 721/22.²⁰ We know very little about this, but, as Magdalino argues, it probably included staged public debates recapitulating the main dividing points between Judaism and Christianity.²¹ This would have included Christian veneration of the cross, saints, relics, and icons, the arguments for and against which had been given repeatedly over the past century in numerous anti-Jewish texts.²² Whatever precisely happened, these forcible conversions reinforced Leo's other moves to position himself as a Christian ruler.

However, it was his martial credentials that underpinned Leo's legitimacy, and on the critical Arab front clouds were gathering. Arab raids recommenced already in 719. Things notably worsened with the accession of Hisham (724–43). In 727 a large army besieged Nicaea, deep within imperial territory. We know that this resurgence did not lead to another attempt to take Constantinople, but contemporaries did not. Indeed, the remainder of Leo's reign would be dominated by war with the Arabs, the pressure only abating after a major victory in 740.²³

18 Geoffrey King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985), 267–77.

19 For the significance of the Cross and its associations with Constantine I and imperial victory, see John Moorhead, "Iconoclasm, the Cross and the Imperial Image," *Byzantion* 55 (1985), 165–79.

20 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 401.

21 Paul Magdalino, "The Other Image at the Palace Gate and the Visual Propaganda of Leo III," in Denis Sullivan, Elizabeth Fisher, and Stratis Papaioannou (eds.), *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot* (Leiden: 2012), 139–53.

22 For these anti-Jewish texts see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: 1997), 78–87.

23 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 75–76.

2 Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III: The Sources

The image debate emerged within this context of renewed anxiety. The only contemporary documents surviving from inside the empire are three letters of Patriarch Germanos preserved in the *Acta* of the iconophile Second Council of Nicaea of 787.²⁴

The first is to John, metropolitan of Synada. John had written to Germanos complaining about Constantine of Nakoleia, a bishop under John's jurisdiction. Germanos replied he had already met with Constantine, having independently already heard about him. At that meeting Constantine had spoken against venerating man-made objects, citing Exodus 20:4: "You shall not make any likeness to venerate it, of what is in heaven above and what is on earth."²⁵ Instead, one should honour the martyrs who could act as intercessors. Germanos offered a defence of images that Constantine apparently accepted, along with Germanos' command to, "say or do nothing that would scandalize the congregations."²⁶ Constantine was to present himself and this letter to John. Therefore, John need not summon a local synod, and could avoid being "involved yourself in any scandal over this."

The second letter addressed to Constantine is much curter. Constantine had disobeyed orders. Germanos reminded him of his promise, "to say or do nothing insulting to the Lord or his saints on account of their image, but simply to present the scriptural teaching about ascribing divine honour to nothing in creation."²⁷ Constantine was suspended from his priestly functions until he delivered the letter to John, thereby indicating his submission.

These letters clearly date from the very beginnings of the dispute. Germanos evidently wished to minimise the issue and avoid the publicity of a local synod. Constantine is depicted as a solitary figure. Nor was he an iconoclast, with no mention of image destruction. Constantine's objection was that the veneration of man-made objects was prohibited by the Second Commandment. In response, Germanos does not say that icon veneration was necessary, only that it was permissible.

24 *Second Council of Nicaea*, ed. Erich Lambergz *ACO* 2.3, 3 vols (Berlin: 2008–16), 442–78; trans. Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), 2 vols (Liverpool: 2018). The scholarship on these letters is vast. For excellent overviews of the recent scholarship see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 94–105, 186–87; Price, *Nicaea*, 249–58.

25 Nicaea, 442.

26 Nicaea, 448; Price, 338.

27 Nicaea, 452; Price, 339.

Prima facie this was a minor dispute. However, something worried Germanos, hence his insistence on handling the matter quietly. Moreover, that Germanos had already heard something about this relatively minor bishop implies that Constantine's arguments were circulating widely. Perhaps Germanos was concerned that Constantine would attract support if his arguments were given the publicity of an official hearing.

Germanos' third letter, to Thomas metropolitan bishop of Klaudiopolis, is much longer and self-evidently later. Germanos complained that despite having stayed with him, Thomas had never broached the issue of images. Rather:

you maintained a complete silence with us over the matter, and when you returned to your city, you carried out ... as if on the basis of a common doctrine ... a removal of the images.²⁸

Germanos then offers a long defence of Christian religious imagery and veneration. Strikingly he begins with an attack on Jews, pagans, and Muslims:

not only now but often have both the Jews and also the real devotees of idolatry brought this up as a slur against us, in an attempt simply to besmear our immaculate and inspired faith. ... the word of truth stops their mouths by mentioning their own impious practices, ... putting the Jews to shame by reproaching them over not only the recourse of their fathers to idols but also their opposition to the divine law which they boast of upholding ... As for the Saracens, since they too make this criticism, it is sufficient for shaming and disgracing them to mention the way in which right up to this day they perform in the desert prayers to a lifeless stone—their invocation of the so-called Khobar [i.e., the *Kaaba*].²⁹

The message is clear: Jews, Muslims, and pagans were the true idolaters. Throughout Germanos denies that Christians had fallen afoul of the Second Commandment. Germanos finishes by imploring Thomas not to join those giving ammunition to “the enemies of the cross of Christ” by claiming that Christians had fallen into idolatry: “For certainly they will be able to say with plausibility that those who have once been in error cannot possibly carry conviction, since they are not in possession of the truth.” It was also vital not to

²⁸ Nicaea, 454; Price, 341.

²⁹ Nicaea, 456–58; Price, 341–42.

cause a scandal amongst the laity, which had happened as “now whole cities and many congregations are in no slight turmoil over this.”³⁰

Stylistically and structurally this is where the letter should end. Yet two further sections exist in the preserved version. The second recounts several miracles performed by images and is clearly a later interpolation.³¹ The first declares:

And what of the fact that our emperors themselves, in all respects most pious Christ-loving, having erected a monument truly [expressive] of their own piety, I mean the image in front of the imperial palace, in which, by placing the apostles and prophets and inscribing thereon these men's statements about the Lord, they have proclaimed the source of their pride and confidence, namely the salvific cross?³²

What seems to be described is a cross surrounded by apostles and prophets holding up biblical passages referring to Christ and the cross.

Interpreting this is very difficult. The only indication of when this image was created is the mention of multiple emperors, meaning it postdates 720. Perhaps it predates imperial intervention in iconoclasm ca. 726–30. Certainly, the image fits the context of the early 720s, with Leo posing as *Defensor fidei* and venerator of the cross.³³ At this stage that could include religious figural imagery. However, we should not place too much emphasis on these figures. The focus was clearly the cross, with the figures primarily there to carry scriptural passages testifying to the cross's importance. As such, whenever Leo erected the image it might well have remained standing long after the “official” beginnings of iconoclasm, especially if imperial policy was in reality moderate and focused on veneration rather than images themselves.³⁴

As is often the case in this subject, we have too little evidence to make definitive statements. Even worse, any speculation must acknowledge Price's cogent arguments that the passage displays unmistakable signs of editorial alteration.³⁵ The most likely moment for this was at Nicaea. After all, the inclusion

30 Nicaea, 474; Price, 352.

31 Paul Speck, “Ein weiterer interpolierter Text in den Akten des Konzils von 787: Der Brief des Patriarch Germanos an Thomas von Klaudiopolis,” in A. Abramea et al. (eds.), *Byzantio, kratos kai koinonia* (Athens: 2003), 481–90.

32 Nicaea, 474–76; Price, 352–53.

33 Magdalino, “Other Image.”

34 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 103, n.109.

35 Price, *Nicaea*, 352–53, nn.524–28.

of this story, one of the very few times Leo III and Constantine V were mentioned in 787, painted the emperors in an iconophile light. This concurs with the general line taken at Nicaea that iconoclasm was not an imperially generated heresy, but rather an episcopal one. The very inclusion of the first two letters served the purpose of pinpointing the rather minor bishop Constantine of Nakoleia as the heresy's source, rather than the emperors. Perhaps the whole story was a later creation. This is probably too sceptical given how well it accords with Leo's known promotion of the cross. What cannot be assumed with any certainty is that the story was in the original letter.

Most commentators argue that all the letters were written while Germanos was patriarch. For some, all three must pre-date 726 given there is no mention of any role by the emperors.³⁶ However, this might reflect political tact by the patriarch.³⁷ What is certain is that some time separates the first two letters from the third. The controversy had expanded to "many congregations," and from words to some removing images. The issue had become important enough that Germanos expected Thomas to raise it with him. Germanos' tone also radically changes, from one of command to pained exhortation of a friend. For Speck, followed by Brubaker and Haldon, this indicates that Germanos was no longer patriarch.³⁸ Indeed, they argue the letter is better read as a product of the late 740s and Constantine V's measures against icons. There is no evidence to support this, though none to conclusively rule it out either. Likewise, while it is possible that Germanos wrote after his resignation this is unproven. Thomas was a personal friend, and Germanos might have chosen to write in the mode of wounded friendship irrespective of his patriarchal status.³⁹ Moreover, whereas Constantine was a minor bishop—who even so felt free to flout patriarchal authority—Thomas was metropolitan of a major see close to the capital, and so much harder to browbeat. Furthermore, given the controversy's spread Germanos might have felt too weak to impose his authority, especially if Leo III was known to be supportive of the iconoclasts. The case cannot be proven, but even if Germanos wrote the letter to Thomas after 730 there is little reason to believe it was long after.

The letters are evidence that some bishops were arguing against veneration of man-made images, and that this led some to remove them. There is no

36 Hans Georg Thümmel, *Die Konzilien zur Bilderfrage im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert: Das 7. Ökumenische Konzil in Nikaia 787* (Paderborn: 2005), 28–30, 44.

37 Gero, *Leo III*, 87–90.

38 Paul Speck, *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren* (Bonn: 1981), 267–81; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 104–05, 186–87.

39 Price, *Nicaea*, 256.

explicit reference to destruction or persecution, only significant commotion. Debate focused on whether acts of veneration, such as prostration and kissing, constituted idolatry. For the iconophobes they did, based on prohibitions in scripture. For iconophiles like Germanos such acts were not idolatrous, as worship was reserved to God. Moreover, such actions were sanctioned by tradition, and to question them was to agree with Jewish and Muslim criticisms.

Two other contemporary sources surviving from outside the empire purport to convey details about iconoclasm in Byzantium. The first is the *Liber Pontificalis*, papal biographies produced relatively contemporaneously and comprising a semi-official papal history. The life of Gregory II (715–31) records how sometime between 725–27 Leo III's attempt to raise taxes from nominally imperial territory in Italy led to a revolt spearheaded by the pontiff. After this:

In the mandates he later sent, the emperor decreed that no church image of any saint, martyr or angel should be kept, as he declared them all accursed ... the pious man despised the prince's profane mandate, ... armed himself against the emperor as an enemy, denouncing his heresy and writing that Christians everywhere must guard against the impiety that had arisen.⁴⁰

The narrative shifts to events in Italy 728–29, before returning to Leo's attempt:

to force his way on everyone in Constantinople by both compulsion and persuasion to take down images, wherever they were, of the Saviour, his holy mother, and all the saints, and, what is painful to mention to burn them in the middle of the city ... Since many of that city's population were preventing this crime, some were beheaded and others paid the price by mutilation.⁴¹

A textual revision, probably in the 740s or 750s, also has Leo ordering the whitewashing of all painted churches.⁴² A brief account is given of Germanos' removal as patriarch, and Gregory's refusal to acknowledge his replacement Anastasios' synodical letter reporting his appointment. The life of Gregory III (731–41) adds that the new pontiff wrote letters to the emperors condemning

40 *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, 2 vols (Paris: 1886–92), 91.17, trans. Raymond Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: 1992), 11. For a discussion of the West's response to iconoclasm, see Chapter 12 in the present *Companion*.

41 *LP* 91.23–24; Davis 15–16.

42 Thomas Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009), 55.

their heresy, a position reinforced by a synod convened in 731.⁴³ After this the *Liber Pontificalis* ignores iconoclasm until the 760s, save for repeated accounts of popes setting up images in prominent places.⁴⁴

Given the already strained relations between Constantinople and Rome, the *Liber Pontificalis* had every incentive to blacken Leo's reputation through exaggeration of negative tales. However, the text is sufficiently honest to portray the papacy in revolt before iconoclasm. Moreover, there is little reason to doubt the core of the text existed almost contemporaneously. The relative moderation of Leo's supposed mandate around 727 lends the account plausibility. It was only concerned with images of saints and angels, saying nothing about Christ or Mary. It only mentions images in churches. It insists on removal, not destruction. This is in marked contrast to the report of later events in Constantinople. Perhaps this reflected reality, and Leo's campaign had intensified. However, recent commentators are rightly united in arguing that this passage, based not on a document sent to Rome but potentially on nothing more than rumours circulating in a hostile environment, hugely exaggerated reality.⁴⁵

Two other western sources give some credence to the *Liber Pontificalis*. Bede writing in the late 720s in faraway Northumbria, but drawing on Roman sources including the *Liber Pontificalis*, noted in his *On the Temple* that some were arguing on the basis of the Second Commandment that one should not make images of living things.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, a now lost inscription from a church erected around 729 by the Lombard king Liutprand (712–44) outside Pavia, declared that it was built “At the time Caesar Leo fell into the pit of schism from the summit of righteousness persuaded by a miserable scholar.”⁴⁷ While Bede does not mention Byzantium, and the inscription does not mention iconoclasm, together they reinforce the *Liber Pontificalis*' insistence that a controversy concerning images had estranged pope and emperor in the late 720s.

43 *LP* 92.2–4.

44 For these and a discussion of the surviving physical evidence from Rome see Noble, *Images*, 124–39.

45 Noble, *Images*, 60.

46 Bede, *De templo*, ed. David Hurst, *CCCM* 119A (Turnhout: 1969), 2.19.10. See Paul Darby, “Bede, Iconoclasm and the Temple of Solomon,” *Early Medieval Europe* 21 (2013): 390–421.

47 Francesca Dell'Acqua and Clemens Gantner, “Resenting Byzantine Iconoclasm: Its Early Reception in Italy through an Inscription from Corteolona,” *Medieval Worlds* 9 (2019): 160–86; Marc Lauxtermann, “A Lombard Epigram in Greek,” in Marc Lauxtermann and Ida Toth (eds.), *Inscribing Texts in Byzantium* (Abingdon: 2020), 365–76. The latter associates this inscription with another, in Greek, describing how Liutprand set up a gilded icon of St Peter in Pavia.

Our second major external contemporary source are the three treatises of John of Damascus *Against Those who Attack the Divine Images*, written in Palestine. Once again there has been considerable debate over dating.⁴⁸ Traditionally the first is dated ca. 726–30, reflecting the first news of events in Byzantium. The second mentions Germanos' deposition so must postdate 730. The last is the least impassioned and contains the longest *florilegium* of supporting texts, which Louth cogently argues means it is a later text of probably the early 740s. In contrast, Speck argued that all three were produced around 741–50, in response to the activities of Constantine v.⁴⁹ While accepted by Brubaker and Haldon, this is distinctly speculative and reads against the evidence of several passages.⁵⁰ For instance, John includes the following notable remark:

But then they say, Make an image of Christ and of his Mother ... and let that suffice. What an absurdity! You confess that you are an enemy of the saints! For if you make an image of Christ, but in no wise the saints, it is clear that you do not prohibit the image, but rather the honour due to the saints, ... You are not waging a war against images, but against the saints.⁵¹

This implies that some iconophobes were happy with images of Christ and Mary, but not of saints. This bears a striking similarity with the mandates sent to Gregory II and the complaint of Constantine in the letter to John. Therefore, it seems likely that all three belong to the same period, namely the mid to late 720s. This is reinforced by the fact that this argument disappears from the second and third treatises, and in the *Liber Pontificalis* and the letter to Thomas, presumably reflecting the evolution of the iconophobe argument into a blanket critique against all religious figural imagery.

The second treatise explicitly attacks Leo:

Since many things have been handed down in unwritten form in the Church and preserved up to now, why do you split hairs over the images? Manichees composed the Gospel according to Thomas; are you now

48 Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Period (ca. 680–850): The Sources* (Aldershot: 2001), 248–50.

49 Speck, *Artabasdos*, 179–243.

50 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 183–86.

51 John of Damascus, *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 3 (Berlin: 1975), 1.19; trans. Andrew Louth, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: 2003), 32–33.

going to write the Gospel according to Leo? I do not accept an emperor who tyrannically snatches at the priesthood. Have emperors received the authority to bind and to loose? I know that Valens was called a Christian emperor and persecuted the Orthodox faith, as well as Zeno and Anastasius, Heraclius and Constantine who died in Sicily, and Bardanes Philippicus. I am not persuaded that the church should be constituted by imperial canons, but rather by patristic traditions, both written and unwritten.⁵²

Leo's right to intervene in church affairs is rejected, and he is placed in a line of imperial heretics. If composed in Constantine V's reign, why did John not mockingly claim that the emperor might as well write a gospel according to Constantine? Another instance in the second treatise complains images in a church in Cyprus had been removed due to the "wild and savage Leo."⁵³ Again, why did John not say Constantine if he was responsible? Notably, in the corresponding passage in the first treatise the images were still in place, an indication of the evolution of the controversy to include actual image-removal.⁵⁴

The explicit criticism of Leo in John's second treatise is mirrored by non-specific criticism in the first:

We shall not suffer the custom of the fathers to be subject to an imperial constitution that seeks to overthrow it. For it is not for pious emperors to overthrow ecclesiastical laws.⁵⁵

This seems to indicate that John's principal foe was the Byzantine emperor. However, we should not ignore John's Palestinian context. The first third of the 8th century was when Islam appropriated the public space of the Near East, and there was increasing Muslim polemic against Christian practices including image veneration, most dramatically witnessed by the iconoclast decree of Yazid II (720–24).⁵⁶ Such pressure apparently led some Christians to remove figural imagery from their churches.⁵⁷ Given this, it is hardly surprising that

52 John of Damascus, *Imag.* 2.16; Louth, 73.

53 John of Damascus, *Imag.* 2.18; Louth, 74.

54 John of Damascus, *Imag.* 1.25.

55 John of Damascus, *Imag.* 1.66; Louth, 57.

56 Sidney Griffith, "Crosses, Icons and the Image of Christ in Edessa: The Place of Iconophobia in the Christian-Muslim Controversies of Early Islamic Times," in Philip Rousseau and Manolis Papoutsakis (eds.), *Transformations of Late Antiquity* (Farnham: 2009), 63–84.

57 See Chapter 11 in this *Companion*.

John had ready access to arguments in defence of images, and wrote as if the church were under attack and divided. Plausibly some elements of his argument were aimed at local iconoclasts more than Byzantine ones. Whatever the truth, the context in the Caliphate gives additional credence to the idea that the first two treatises were composed at some point around 730.

If so, what can they tell us? First, the controversy was more about arguments than actions. John gives very little detail on actual image destruction. Cases of persecution are limited to Germanos and unnamed bishops being flogged and exiled.⁵⁸ John confirms that the argument revolved around idolatry, and especially the interpretation of the Old Testament. Further, although one can hazily perceive different camps of iconophobes, Leo III is the only named iconoclast and is clearly designated the leader. There is considerable doubt over whether John's treatises contain good evidence for Leo enacting an edict against images.⁵⁹ However, John's repeated critique that it was synods not emperors that legislated for the Church implies that Leo had not called anything that could be called a synod, but had on his own initiative announced something.

Turning to the narrative sources, the *Short History* of the future patriarch Nikephoros composed in the 780s situates iconoclasm firmly in the context of the volcanic eruption of Thera in 726:

On this account [Leo] took up a position contrary to the true faith and planned the removal of the holy icons, mistakenly believing that the portent had occurred because they were set up and adored. He tried to expound his own doctrine to the people, while many men lamented the insult done to the church.⁶⁰

At this stage there was no definite action, only plans and words. Even so, Nikephoros claims it triggered a rebellion in Greece that was swiftly suppressed. Nikephoros gives a brief report on the failed Arab siege of Nicaea in 727, before returning to the image question:

the emperor convened to the palace a great throng of people ... and summoned Germanos, ... whom he pressed to subscribe [to the suppression] of the holy icons. The latter declined to do so and laid aside his priesthood, saying, "Without an ecumenical synod I cannot make a

58 John of Damascus, *Imag.* 2.12.

59 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 120–21.

60 Nikephoros, *History*, 60; Mango, 129.

written declaration of faith.” Retiring thence to his ancestral house, he spent in it the remainder of his life. In succession to him Anastasios, ... was appointed archpriest. From that time onward many pious men who would not accept the imperial doctrine suffered many punishments and tortures.⁶¹

This is all the *Short History* has to say about iconoclasm under Leo. It does not explicitly say that Leo destroyed images. Rather the focus was getting Germanos to subscribe to a document concerning them, the details of which are not provided. Germanos refused and was permitted to retire. Interestingly, Nikephoros’ Germanos does not defend icons, but merely objects to the process. Germanos was replaced by Anastasios, who presumably subscribed to the “imperial doctrine.” Those who did not, none of whom are named, suffered unspecified punishments.

A very different version circulated at Nicaea in 787. There Germanos was depicted as a doughty defender of images. His opponent was not Leo but Constantine of Nakoleia. Iconoclasm’s origins lay with a Jewish soothsayer who promised Yazid 11 long life if he destroyed images. Yazid proceeded to do so, but quickly died. However, Constantine and his associates “imitated the lawless Jews and the impious Arabs and committed outrages on the churches of God.”⁶² This is the earliest incarnation of a story that would spread far and wide.⁶³ It is fantastical and obviously a slander designed to present iconoclasm as a Jewish and Muslim perversion alien to the Church.

Theophanes’ *Chronicle*, composed ca. 808–13, elaborates and expands upon Nikephoros and Nicaea. Theophanes includes the story of Yazid and the Jewish magician, but linked Leo to the fantasy.⁶⁴ In 724/25:

the impious emperor Leo started making pronouncements about the removal of the holy and venerable icons. When Gregory, the Pope of Rome, had been informed of this, he withheld the taxes of Italy and of Rome and wrote to Leo a doctrinal letter to the effect that an emperor ought not to make pronouncements concerning the faith nor to alter

61 Nikephoros, *History*, 62; Mango, 131.

62 Nicaea, 594; Price, 420.

63 See Gero, *Leo*, 59–84; Paul Speck, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus* (Bonn: 1990).

64 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 401–2.

the ancient doctrines of the Church which had been defined by the holy Fathers.⁶⁵

No other source has Leo doing anything so early. The corresponding events in the *Liber Pontificalis* date to 727, dovetailing with Nikephoros' claim that Leo first spoke against icons in 726. In part this addition to Nikephoros' narrative is due to Theophanes' access to a different source, most probably Theophilus of Edessa.⁶⁶ Judging by what survives in other versions, Theophilus had Leo's iconoclasm begin around 724–26.⁶⁷ However, Theophanes did not just cram material into his chronicle willy-nilly. For instance, this is what Agapios, also using Theophilus, says about the beginnings of iconoclasm:

Leo ordered the images of the martyrs to be effaced from churches, residences and monasteries. When Gregory, patriarch of Rome, learned of that, he was angry and forbade the inhabitants of Rome and Italy to pay Leo taxes.⁶⁸

Interestingly, this provides corroboration that the debate began about images of saints. In contrast, Theophanes turns this into a more general statement about icons, and has Gregory reprove Leo for breaking with Orthodox tradition.⁶⁹ Moreover, Theophanes was probably making a point by placing this account here, for immediately following he records the successful Arab capture of Caesarea-in-Cappadocia and the eruption of Thera.⁷⁰ Thus defeat and natural disaster followed Leo's heresy, and so iconoclasm could not be seen as a remedy for divine wrath. Theophanes explicitly has Leo make that mistake in his entry for 726:

Thinking that God's wrath was in his favour instead of being directed against him, he stirred up a more ruthless war on the holy and venerable icons, ... filled with boorishness and complete ignorance, the cause of

65 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 404; Mango and Scott, 558.

66 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 168–70. For Theophilus, see Robert Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle* (Liverpool: 2011).

67 Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 224–25.

68 Agapios, *History*, ed. A. A. Vasiliev, "Kitab al-'Unvan: Histoire universelle écrite par Agapius (Mahboub) de Menbidj," Part 2.2, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912), 506, trans. Hoyland, *Theophilus*, 225.

69 This is probably referring to the purported letters of Gregory II to Leo III, which were probably fabricated in the early 9th century; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 277.

70 Theophanes, 404.

most evils. The populace of the Imperial City were much distressed by the new-fangled doctrine and meditated an assault upon him. They also killed a few of the emperor's men who had taken down the Lord's image that was above the great Bronze Gate [the Chalke], with the result that many were punished in the cause of the true faith by mutilation, lashes, banishment, and fines, especially those who were prominent by birth and culture. This led to the extinction of schools and of the pious education ... destroyed along with many other good things by this Saracen-minded Leo.⁷¹

At its core, this passage accords with Nikephoros that Thera's eruption led Leo to argue against icons. However, Theophanes provides additional discrediting details. Leo is called "Saracen-minded," and adds that the iconoclasts were too ignorant to understand the true meaning of Scripture.⁷² Theophanes gives the charge depth by claiming that those who resisted were "prominent by birth and culture," whose persecution led directly to the decline of education.

This deliberate besmirching of Leo sets the scene for the most famous act in Byzantine iconoclasm: the destruction of the icon on the Chalke gate, the main entrance to the imperial palace. Once the textbook introduction to imperial iconoclasm, now this story is Exhibit A in the revisionists' case that much of the classic narrative of Byzantine iconoclasm is fabricated.⁷³ Neither Nikephoros nor Nicaea mention the episode. Indeed, the event first appears in Theophanes and the even more virulently anti-iconoclast *Life of Stephen the Younger*, composed ca. 807–09.⁷⁴ Nor do they agree on details, with the *vita* dating the event to after Anastasios' elevation as patriarch, and giving the starring resistance role to pious women. Moreover, there is no clear evidence that the Chalke icon even existed at the time Leo III was supposedly removing it.

71 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 405; Mango and Scott, 559–60.

72 For the iconophile charge that iconoclasts suffered from *amathia*, "boorishness/ignorance," see Marie-France Auzépy, "State of Emergency (700–850)," in Jonathan Shepard (ed.), *The Cambridge History to the Byzantine Empire, c.500–1492* (Cambridge: 2008), 251–91, 278.

73 The original argument was given by Marie-France Auzépy, "La destruction de l'icône du Christ de la Chalce par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?," *Byzantion* 40 (1990): 445–92. For the scholarly debate since, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 128–35.

74 *Life of Stephen the Younger*, ed. Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le diacre* (Aldershot: 1997), 10. This story became even more elaborate in later versions, see Cyril Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen: 1959), 116–18.

The revisionists' case is highly persuasive. In all likelihood the most famous case of imperial iconoclasm is a myth. We cannot be certain what generated it, but we do know that at some point Irene placed an icon on the Chalke, for in 815 Leo V removed it.⁷⁵ Possibly iconophiles created a backstory for Irene's action, turning it from an innovation into a restoration. Whatever the truth, this legend had an impact, and not just in the memory of iconoclasm. For when Leo V removed Irene's icon, we are told he was explicitly emulating Leo III, who by 815 was firmly remembered as having removed the "original" Chalke icon.

Theophanes' narrative continues with the failed rebellion in Hellas and the Cyclades. Although both Nikephoros and Theophanes link the rebellion to iconoclasm, most scholars are rightly sceptical, preferring to situate it within a long-term pattern of provincial rebellions and Leo's efforts to overhaul the tax system.⁷⁶

Theophanes' next iconoclast event occurred during the siege of Nicaea in 727:

A certain Constantine, who was the *strator* of Artabasdos, on seeing an image of the Theotokos that had been set up, picked up a stone and threw it at her. He broke the image and trampled upon it ... He then saw in a vision the Lady standing beside him and saying to him: "See, what a brave thing you have done to me! Verily, upon your head have you done it." The next day when the Saracens attacked ... that wretched man rushed to the walls like the brave soldier he was and was struck by a stone ... and it broke his head and face, a just reward for his impiety. After collecting many captives and booty, the Arabs withdrew. In this manner God showed to the impious one [Leo III] that he had overcome his fellow-countrymen not on account of his impiety, as he himself boasted, but for some divine cause and inscrutable judgement, whereby so great an Arab force was driven away from the city of the holy Fathers thanks to their intercession—on account of their exact likenesses that are honoured therein—and this too in reproof and unanswerable condemnation of the tyrant and in vindication of the true believers.⁷⁷

75 *Scriptor incertus*, ed. Francesca Iadevaia (2nd ed., Messina: 1997), 64.

76 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 405; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 80–82. For an argument that iconoclasm did play a role in this rebellion and the later civil war, see Warren Treadgold, "Opposition to Iconoclasm as Grounds for Civil War," in Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis, *Byzantine War Ideology between Roman Imperial Concept and Christian Religion* (Vienna: 2012), 33–39.

77 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 405–06; Mango and Scott, 560–61.

This is a decidedly odd story. But beneath the contortions there is a simple narrative: an adjutant of Artabasdos, general of the *Opiskion* army and Leo's son-in-law, committed an act of iconoclasm and the siege was lifted. This is a pro-iconoclast story that Theophanes attempts to distort into an anti-iconoclast one.⁷⁸ Such a conclusion is supported by the line that Leo was boasting that his piety had led to the victory, and the description as the soldier as "brave," something that sits oddly in Theophanes' story but might have been in an original pro-iconoclast source.⁷⁹ Apart from the Chalke icon, this is the only other specific act of iconoclasm related by Theophanes for Leo's reign. It was not an imperially ordered action, and only one icon was destroyed.

Theophanes adds the following diatribe:

Not only was the impious man in error concerning the relative worship of the holy icons, but also concerning the intercession of the all-pure Theotokos and all the saints, and he abominated their relics like his mentors the Arabs.⁸⁰

We can safely ignore the charge that Leo argued against the intercession of the Virgin, saints, and relics as yet another smear. No one else makes this claim, and if iconoclasts ever flirted with such ideas it was only in the later years of Constantine v.⁸¹ In contrast to Theophanes' rhetoric, Leo's recorded actions are moderate, merely trying to persuade Germanos to his side.⁸² The action culminated in 730:

the impious Leo convened a *silentium* against the holy and venerable icons in the Tribunal of the Nineteen Couches, to which he had also invited the most holy patriarch Germanos, whom he thought he could persuade to sign a condemnation of the icons. But Christ's courageous servant was in no way persuaded by Leo's abominable error: after expounding correctly the true doctrine, he resigned from the episcopacy ... he said, "If I am Jonah, cast me into the sea. For without an ecumenical council it is

78 Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in Bryer and Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm*, 1–6, 2–3.

79 Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 562 n.12. Note in contrast that Warren Treadgold, *Middle Byzantine Historians* (Basingstoke: 2013), 21 interprets this as an ironic comment in Theophanes' source.

80 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 406; Mango and Scott, 561.

81 Gero, *Leo*, 100–102.

82 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 407–08.

impossible for me, O emperor, to innovate in matters of faith." He retired to his family house.⁸³

In an example of the growing myth of Germanos, Theophanes has the patriarch bravely defy the emperor.⁸⁴ The rest is largely the same as in Nikephoros' account. Leo convened a meeting of imperial officials, a *silentium/silention*, at which the patriarch refused to sign a document condemning icons and was permitted to retire.⁸⁵ Pope Gregory resisted and rejected the synodical letter of the new patriarch. As a result:

In his anger the tyrant intensified the assault on the holy icons. Many clerics, monks, and pious laymen faced danger on behalf of the true faith and won the crown of martyrdom.⁸⁶

Like Nikephoros, Theophanes does not refer to iconoclasm again for the remainder of Leo's reign.

3 Iconoclasm under Leo III: What, Who, and Why?

Overall the evidence for physical iconoclasm under Leo is remarkably meagre. There are general statements, but they are often lacking in detail. There is no good evidence for any specific icon being destroyed on imperial orders. Only the *Liber Pontificalis* explicitly has Leo gathering and burning icons. This could be reasonably dismissed as hyperbole by a hostile, distant source. At most it might refer to a symbolic act of destruction focused on easily portable and perishable images.

In contrast, the evidence for heated arguments over icon veneration is impressive. Too many sources mention a dispute in the 720s to be discounted. In particular, something happened ca. 726, following the eruption of Thera and in the context of renewed war with the Arabs. The argument was relatively simple. Iconoclasts charged that icon veneration was idolatry, forbidden by the Second Commandment. Iconophiles countered that icon veneration was not worship, pointing to moments in the Old Testament when God commanded

83 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 408–09; Mango and Scott 565.

84 For the development of Germanos as an iconophile hero, see Price, *Nicaea*, 249–58.

85 For *silentia*, see Aiketarine Christophilopoulou, "Σιλέντιον," *BZ* 44 (1951), 79–85.

86 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 409; Mango and Scott, 565.

images to be made. Seemingly in the beginning some iconophobes only censured images of saints, but this evolved into a critique of all icon veneration.

Who were these iconophobes? Germanos' letters prove that bishops were among their number. They might imply that the dispute arose independently among the episcopacy, specifically naming Constantine of Nakoleia. Certainly, that was the line espoused at Nicaea. However, it was Leo's actions that really mattered. All sources bar Nicaea identify Leo as *the* iconoclast, and Nicaea had every interest in shifting the blame given Leo III's great-grandson Constantine VI was on the throne. However, Nicaea admits the truth of imperial involvement when talking to an audience outside the empire, for in the *sacra* sent to Pope Hadrian I inviting him to send representatives to Nicaea, the emperors alone are blamed for destroying and dishonouring icons.⁸⁷ It is also suggestive that Nicaea II is the first ecumenical council not to anathematize individuals, only unnamed groups. Had Constantine of Nakoleia truly been the heresiarch, he surely would have been explicitly anathematized.

What precisely did Leo do? Around 726 Leo began talking about at least some icon-veneration being idolatrous. He unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the two most powerful bishops, sending a letter to Gregory and leaning on Germanos. In 730, at a ceremonial meeting of imperial officials, a document was prepared that Germanos refused to sign. We do not know what it said, and there has been much debate over whether this was an official edict prohibiting icons.⁸⁸ Most likely it was something less legalistic. Probably it was a statement of faith condemning icon veneration as idolatry.⁸⁹ After his refusal, Germanos retired. While some have doubted the link between Germanos' resignation and iconoclasm, this does seem to be the most plausible reading.⁹⁰ However, Germanos was not the iconophile hero of later legend, offering fairly tepid resistance, reflected in the leniency of his punishment. In his place a patriarch was appointed Anastasios who we must assume did sign the document. Presumably this was then circulated. Anastasios also sent a letter to his patriarchal peers announcing his appointment, which was rejected by the papacy.

Given the very limited evidence for mass destruction, there cannot have been explicit imperial orders to destroy all religious figural imagery. More likely the focus was on the practice of icon-veneration, stopping which did not

87 Nicaea, 5.

88 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 119–27.

89 Anastasius I (491–518) had similarly used *silentia* to make statements of faith; see Arnold Hugh Martin Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602*, 2 vols (Oxford: 1964), 338.

90 For literature and a sceptical position on Germanos' resignation, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 123–25.

necessarily require physical iconoclasm. It is possible that the official line in 730 merely condemned icon veneration as idolatry without further instructions, or only gave instructions about particularly problematic practices. Whatever it said, how imperial policy was enforced on the ground was heavily influenced by local officials, especially the bishops. As a result, some places might have seen widespread destruction while others witnessed little change.

What can be said with certainty is that whatever “iconoclasm” took place, it was distinctly episodic. There is no good evidence for even debate before ca. 726 and no mention of anything post-730. This is a small portion of Leo’s twenty-four-year reign. Indeed, Leo would probably be astonished to learn he was mainly remembered for iconoclasm. In truth, Leo’s reign was dominated by the war with the caliphate. Apart from war, law was Leo’s main focus. Published in 741, the *Ecloga* is a legal compendium and the only substantial text that survives direct from the Isaurian regime.⁹¹ In it Leo and Constantine are presented as divinely-elected Old Testament kings, imposing Scripture-inspired law to morally reform the new Chosen People. There is no mention whatsoever of iconoclasm. Even when discussing religious imagery, Leo probably spent more time promoting the cross than opposing icons.⁹² Yet for all that imperial iconoclasm was moderate, episodic, and less significant than other aspects, a debate over icons did occur, almost certainly some icons were destroyed, and Leo was identified as the main iconophobe.

Why? In some respects, the answer is simple. Byzantium had suffered a century of defeat. To the Byzantine mind the ultimate cause was God punishing them for some sin. The question then becomes: why were icons identified as the source of divine wrath? Iconoclasm is a latent possibility in Christianity thanks to the Old Testament’s injunctions against idolatry.⁹³ However, the very fact that until this moment, despite centuries of Christian figural imagery, iconoclasm and iconophobic arguments were very rare proves that it is merely latent. Hence the question becomes why did the controversy arise in Byzantium in the 720s?⁹⁴

91 *Ecloga*, ed. Ludwig Burgmann (Frankfurt: 1983); trans. Mike Humphreys, *The Laws of the Isaurian Era: The Ecloga and its Appendices* (Liverpool: 2017). For its significance, see Mike Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era, c.680–850* (Oxford: 2015), 81–129.

92 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 140–43.

93 For a broad history of Christian iconoclasm, see Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: an intellectual history of iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: 2000).

94 Mango, “Historical Introduction,” 2.

Some scholars emphasise internal changes within Byzantium, especially the rise of the icon. The classic case elucidated by Kitzinger is that from the mid-6th century icons proliferated, as did the miracles and cult practices attached to them, resulting eventually in a backlash.⁹⁵ Peter Brown broadened this, arguing that icons were functionally akin to charismatic holy men, offering channels to the divine that were potentially dangerous as they were outside the Church's control.⁹⁶ Icons were indeed even more dangerous as they could be reproduced *ad infinitum*. Therefore, iconoclasm was a centripetal reaction limiting the holy to a few more controllable symbols, like the cross and Eucharist, and denying it to dangerously centrifugal icons.

Both Kitzinger and Brown argued for a gradual rise of the icon. However, this is based on sources gathered and potentially reedited by the iconophiles. Stringent source criticism led Brubaker to argue that the vital transformation of a religious image into "a window through which one could reach the saint depicted," only happened ca. 680.⁹⁷ Essentially the long-established cult of saints expanded to include icons, but, unlike relics, icons were unavoidably man-made objects. Therefore, veneration of icons could be described as idolatry. Hence in Brubaker's analysis iconoclasm was a generational reaction to a recent transformation in religious practice. However, others have argued that this is too sceptical regarding the sources, and that icons were viewed as intermediaries and been the object of cult practices long before ca. 680.⁹⁸ More importantly, a backlash against such practices, whenever they arose, was not inevitable. Something about the 720s either generated misgivings about icons or transformed existing murmurings into a much louder debate.

What is certain is that by the end of the 7th century both state and Church explicitly supported religious figural imagery. Around 690 Justinian II issued coins that for the first time sported a bust of Christ.⁹⁹ Likewise, canon 82 of the Quinisext Council held in 691/92 ordained that Christ should be depicted

95 Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," *DOP* 8 (1954): 83–150.

96 Peter Brown, "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *EHR* 88 (1973), 1–34.

97 Leslie Brubaker, "Icons before Iconoclasm?" *SSCIS* 45 (1998): 1215–54, 1251.

98 See for instance the very different analysis of Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: 2002), 13–59; Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium," *The Art Bulletin* 94 (2012), 368–94.

99 For Justinian's coins, see James Breckenridge, *The Numismatic Iconography of Justinian II* (New York: 1959). For the date, see Mike Humphreys, "A War of Images? Justinian II's Coinage Reform and the Caliphate," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 173 (2013), 229–44.

figurally rather than as a lamb.¹⁰⁰ If designed to gain divine support, these moves signally failed. Justinian could not stem the Arab conquests and was ousted in 695. Returning to power in 705, Justinian issued coins bearing a different image of Christ. Why the image of Christ changed is unknown, but perhaps it reflected, or stimulated, a debate over how Christ should be depicted.¹⁰¹ Whatever the case, as late as Justinian's downfall in 711 Byzantium was using figural depictions of Christ on its coins. Possibly Justinian's failures and unpopularity helped to discredit them.

More certainly, the Quinisext Council constituted an attempt to win divine favour through moral reform, which included the first canon law regulations concerning Christian art.¹⁰² This constituted a shift in focus, away from matters of "orthodoxy," correct belief, towards "orthopraxy," correct practice. For the Christian people to flourish incorrect practices had to be purged, an idea shared by the *Ecloga*. This mental shift made it more likely that emperor and church would deem it their responsibility to regulate matters like icon veneration. Furthermore, the Isaurians' emphasis on the Old Testament as a model for their reign, witnessed particularly in the *Ecloga*, made it even more likely that icon veneration would be identified as a prime sin. After all, the most recurrent sin of the old Chosen People was their habit of idolatry, leading to divine punishment.

All this occurred in the context of the Arab conquests. Even those who place the emphasis on internal factors acknowledge the conquests' critical role in reshaping Byzantine society in ways that made iconoclasm more likely. For instance, Brubaker argues that it was anxiety produced by the conquests that led to the transformation of the icon ca. 680.¹⁰³ Undoubtedly, the era's uncertainty led many to ask why God was punishing them, and plausibly some in response looked to more personal channels to the divine like icons.

Whilst it is uncontroversial to argue the conquests were an indirect cause of iconoclasm, most recent Byzantinists have vehemently denied Islam a more direct influence. Indeed, it is established beyond reasonable doubt that the story of the iconoclasts being directly inspired by Yazid's iconoclasm was an

100 *Quinisext Council*, ed. Heinz Ohme, *ACO* 2.2.4 (Berlin: 2013), canon 82. For the council see Humphreys, *Law*, 37–80.

101 This is hinted at by Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (London: 1985), 96–106.

102 Leslie Brubaker, "In the Beginning was the Word: Art and Orthodoxy at the Councils of Trullo (692) and Nicaea II (787)," in Andrew Louth and Augustine Casiday (eds.), *Byzantine Orthodoxies* (Aldershot: 2006), 95–101.

103 Brubaker, *Inventing*, 15–18; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 774–82.

iconophile myth. Whether or not Yazid's iconoclast decree existed, there is no good reason why any Christian ruler would adopt iconoclasm just to copy a relatively unsuccessful Caliph. Moreover, Byzantine iconoclasm and Islamic iconophobia, even if roughly contemporaneous, were distinct phenomena.¹⁰⁴

However, Islam might have played a greater role than recent sceptics allow. Islam posed a unique challenge to Byzantium. The Arab conquests were on an unparalleled scale, threatening the empire's very existence. Worse they were won in the name of a rival monotheism. As Patricia Crone argued, Byzantium had dealt before with political rivals, and a rival monotheism in the Judaism, but never both in the same enemy.¹⁰⁵ This combination challenged the ideological bedrock on which the empire had existed since the 4th century.

In c.680 many could still believe that the conquests were a temporary rebuke sent by God. The quarter-century of disaster preceding the 717–18 siege shattered such hopes. Any brief resurgence following that victory was stilled by the rapid resumption of raids. Byzantium survived, but no one could doubt that the Caliphate was there to stay, and as the dominant power. While the overriding question this raised was why had God punished his chosen people, there was an obvious corollary: why had he rewarded the Arabs?

Over precisely this period Byzantium and the Caliphate undertook diametrically opposed policies concerning religious figural imagery. Whereas Byzantium embraced the icon as never before, the Caliphate became increasingly aniconic.¹⁰⁶ While contemporary Byzantines might not have had a full understanding of Islam, they could not but be aware of its strident condemnation of idolatry, its rejection of religious figural imagery, and its attack on Christian veneration of the cross, saints, relics, and icons.

The reaction to this challenge was always likely to be mixed. Germanos responded with the counter-charge that it was Muslims who were the real idolaters and pleaded with iconoclasts to desist lest by admitting one part of the Muslim critique they gave credence to it all. Leo's response was a more calculated defiance, befitting the person who most directly had to deal with the Arab threat, and who thanks to his victories probably presumed himself inoculated from the charge of being pro-Muslim. Certainly, the *miliaresion* reveals

104 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 105–117.

105 Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59–95. For a nuanced account of how Islam and Byzantine Christianity affected each other in this period, see Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (London: 1987), 307–43. See also, Judith Herrin, "What Caused Iconoclasm," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65 (2014), 857–866.

106 See Chapter 11 in this *Companion*.

someone able to appropriate an Islamic design and give it a strident Christian message. More suggestive is the letter to Umar and its hesitancy in defending icon veneration. Whenever one dates the rise of the icon, it was certainly later than the cults of the cross, saints, and relics. It simply was not as deeply embedded within Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, scripture gave obvious avenues of attack. Further, if one follows Brubaker, icon veneration was truly a recent phenomenon primarily generated by the Islamic conquests. It was, therefore, the most exposed element of Byzantine Orthodoxy, the hardest to defend, and easiest to remove. Islam was perfectly designed to hit this raw nerve. While a good Christian could never accept that Islam was right about doctrine, it was far harder to simply dismiss the message about idolatry. Indeed, identifying idolatry as the reason for divine wrath not only explained Byzantine defeat, it could also explain Arab success without accepting the core tenets of Islam.

Finally, Islam might have played a particular role in the timing of at least imperial intervention in iconoclasm. In ca. 720 Leo had a powerful message: he was a victorious, cross-venerating emperor, modelled on the Old Testament kings. However, the combination of the resurgence of Arab raids and the eruption of Thera demonstrated that God was still angry. Iconoclasm was then added to the package, a move seemingly justified by the gradual improvement of the war, culminating in a major victory at the battle of Akroinon in 740.

Thus, while Islamic iconoclasm should be discounted as a major factor in causing Byzantine iconoclasm, Islam in a myriad of complex ways shaped Byzantium and the iconoclastic controversy. Of course, it was not the sole cause. There was no single cause. Rather many factors were at play, some recent and peculiar to Byzantium, some ancient and hardwired into Christianity itself.¹⁰⁷

4 Iconoclasm under Constantine v: Accession to Hierieia

If Leo's reign is distorted by iconophile rhetoric, it is nothing compared to opprobrium heaped on Constantine v. Theophanes describes Constantine as:

this pernicious, crazed, bloodthirsty, and most savage beast, who ... from the very start parted company from our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, His pure and all-holy Mother, and all the saints; led astray as he was by magic, licentiousness, bloody sacrifices, by the dung and urine of horses, and delighting in impurity and the invocation of demons.¹⁰⁸

107 See the discussion of causes in Barber, *Figure*, 10.

108 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 413; Mango and Scott 573.

This marked intensification of iconophile invective reflects the iconophiles' pressing need to discredit Constantine, whose notably long and successful reign legitimized his religious policies. Militarily Constantine won notable victories against the Arabs and Bulgars, partially due to the creation of new elite forces stationed in Constantinople called the *Tagmata*. Resources were lavished on the capital. This reflected and stimulated a revival of the economy, in turn spurring a flurry of monastic foundations and expansions, and a revival of learning. By any normal measure Constantine v would be lauded as a great emperor, notably popular among the *Tagmatic* troops and Constantinopolitan populace.¹⁰⁹ Constantine's success threw into sharp relief imperial failures during the Iconophile intermission. The iconophile response was mudslinging. They literally made his name shit, calling him *Kaballinos*, the "horseshit," and *Kopronymos*, "the shit-named."¹¹⁰ Anyone wanting to reconstruct what actual iconoclasm happened under Constantine v has to be highly sceptical when confronted with such polemic.

The first event linked by some to iconoclasm was the civil war that erupted after Leo's death in 741.¹¹¹ For almost two years Constantinople was controlled by Artabasdos, Leo's son-in-law and *comes* of the overmighty *Opsikion* army. For Theophanes the civil war was a direct result of Constantine's impiety, the populace welcoming the orthodox Artabasdos who restored icons. In contrast, Nikephoros presents the civil war more as a run-of-the-mill political conflict.¹¹² Recent scholars largely concur. At most Artabasdos made a bid for whatever iconophile support existed by allowing the restoration of icons. Following his victory Constantine made no recorded moves against iconophiles, which he surely would have done had they played a major role.

Discounting the civil war, the first recorded events connected to iconoclasm under Constantine were a series of public debates in the early 750s. A curious document, the *Nouthesia Gerontos*, purports to detail one of these, a meeting convened in southeastern Anatolia by Cosmas, a bishop acting as Constantine's envoy, who had a public debate with an iconophile named Georgios.¹¹³ The dating of this complex work is much disputed, and no great weight should be placed on the details it gives.¹¹⁴ The argument given by both sides is essentially

¹⁰⁹ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 156–76.

¹¹⁰ For Constantine v's insulting nicknames, see Gero, *Constantine*, 169–75.

¹¹¹ For the civil war, see Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 156–60.

¹¹² Nikephoros, *History*, 64.

¹¹³ *Nouthesia Gerontos*, ed. A. Mitsides, *Ἡ παρουσία τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου εἰς τὸν ἀγῶνα ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶν εἰκότων* (Leukosia: 1989), 153–92.

¹¹⁴ Gero, *Constantine*, 25–36; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 251–52.

unchanged, though Cosmas does add that resistance to iconoclasm equated resistance to the divinely appointed emperor. If the *Nouthesia* bears any resemblance to reality it is evidence of the official effort to widely disseminate iconoclast arguments.

In Constantinople the emperor himself led the charge. As Theophanes records:

the impious Constantine, puffed up in his spirit and making plans against the Church and the orthodox faith, held audiences every day and treacherously urged people to follow his designs, thus paving the way to complete impiety that was later to overtake him.¹¹⁵

Like Leo, Constantine began with talk. Unlike Leo, we have a much better idea of what Constantine said. Two treatises called the *Peuseis* (Enquiries), attributed to Constantine survive in truncated sections thanks to detailed rebuttals written by Nikephoros during his exile in the early years of Second Iconoclasm.¹¹⁶ In the first Constantine unveiled a new argument. Simplifying, it claimed that it was impossible to truly depict Christ for an image either circumscribes Christ's limitless divine nature, or it separates his divine from his human nature. The specifics are covered elsewhere, but we should note that this is the first time the iconoclast argument moved beyond idolatry to arguments based on the nature of Christ. In the second *Peuseis* Constantine argued that the Eucharist was an example of a true image of Christ. These texts had two functions: to present Constantine as the defender of Orthodoxy, and to prepare the ground for the Council of Hiereia in 754.

The Council of Hiereia is that rarest of things: a well-recorded iconoclast event.¹¹⁷ Most importantly, its definition of faith or *Horos* survives thanks to its line-by-line refutation at Nicaea. Between 10 February and 8 August 754, 338 bishops convened as the self-described seventh ecumenical council at the imperial palace of Hiereia on the Bosphorus. We do not know what precisely happened, but the length of time suggests the council engaged in detailed discussion. The result was that Hiereia refined the *Peuseis*, explicitly positioning the argument within established Christological disputes. Those who said one could circumscribe the divine through depiction in an image confused the

¹¹⁵ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 427; Mango and Scott 591.

¹¹⁶ The fragments are gathered in George Ostrogorsky, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (Breslau: 1929), 8–11. For analysis, see Gero, *Constantine*, 37–52.

¹¹⁷ Nicaea, 606–782; For analysis, see Gero, *Constantine*, 53–110; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 189–97.

human and divine natures of Christ, and so were condemned as Monophysites. Those who claimed images of Christ only depicted his human nature were guilty of separating it from his divine nature like Nestorians. Thus, iconophiles were not Christians but heretics. The *Horos* went to great lengths to establish that the iconoclasts were in full accordance with Orthodox tradition, and to condemn the iconophiles as idolatrous innovators. Three iconophile villains were singled out for anathematization: Germanos, the murky figure of George of Cyprus, and John of Damascus.¹¹⁸ In contrast, the much-lauded heroes were the emperors who had convened the council, explained the true theology, and “extirpated all idolatry.”¹¹⁹

Hiereia decreed:

Every image made of whatever material or by the painter’s evil art of colouring is abominated, rejected, and banished from the Christian Church. No man should ever presume any longer to practice this impious and unholy pursuit. Whoever from now on presumes to make an image or venerate it or place it in a church or in a private house or to hide it, if he is a bishop or presbyter or deacon, is to be deposed. If he is a monk or layman, he is to be anathematized and is to be liable to the imperial laws, as opposed to God’s commandment and an enemy of the doctrine of the fathers.¹²⁰

Whereas earlier iconoclasts focused on veneration, Hiereia prohibited the production, veneration, establishment, and possession of religious figural imagery, in churches and in private. This expansion of the forbidden was supported by an increase in authority. While Leo relied on a *silention*, Hiereia was a self-proclaimed ecumenical council, the highest religious authority. This directly countered the iconophile charge, seen in for instance John of Damascus, that only councils could define doctrine, and allowed iconophiles to be labelled and condemned as heretics. This not only incurred the highest religious penalty, anathematization, but also made iconophiles liable to the established heresy laws. For instance, heretics were disbarred from office, branded as infamous, stripped of citizenship and key legal rights such as the ability to write wills. Transgressors could suffer fines, floggings, and exile. All bishops and

118 Nicaea, 782.

119 Nicaea, 778; Price, 684.

120 Nicaea, 746–50; Price, 679.

imperial officials were obliged to apply these penalties on pain of loss of office and fines.¹²¹

What Hiereia did not do was order the total destruction of religious imagery. Indeed, its only explicit mention of physical destruction was a provision designed to limit it:

No man whatsoever, who presides over a church of God or a sacred institution, on the pretext of reducing this deceit of images, is to dare lay his hands on the holy vessels dedicated to God with the purpose of altering them because they have embossed figures on them nor altar cloths or other fabrics, or on anything else dedicated to sacred service ... without the permission of our most blessed ecumenical patriarch and the permission of our most Christ-loving emperors, lest with this pretext the devil humiliates the churches of God. Nor is any of the officials or their subordinates or those of lay status to use this pretext to lay hands on the divine churches and to misappropriate them, as has been done in the past by some who were carried away without restraint.¹²²

This is a very bureaucratic form of iconoclasm, though one should note that these restrictions reflect the iconoclasts' concern with the Eucharist and church property rather than necessarily a wariness in encouraging the destruction of religious images.¹²³ Moreover, the passage reveals both the limits of officially sanctioned iconoclasm, and that unsanctioned iconoclasts had attacked church property before 754.

What practical effect Hiereia had is unknown. 338 bishops attended, essentially the entire Byzantine episcopacy. Even if some were privately ambivalent, they publicly subscribed to the *Horos* and were legally obliged to enforce it. However, neither Nikephoros nor Theophanes record any increase in icon destruction or persecution of iconophiles. Nor does Nicaea, only accusing iconoclasts of hypocrisy, saying that they ignored their own legislation and subsequently did use the excuse of removing images to misappropriate church

121 For heresy laws, see *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. P. Krüger, vol. 2 of *Corpus iuris civilis* (11th ed., Berlin: 1929), Book 1.

122 Nicaea, 754–56, Price, 679–80.

123 For the iconoclasts' interest in promoting the Eucharist and protecting church buildings, and especially anything to do with the altar, see Brown, "Iconoclastic Controversy," 5–6; Marie-France Auzépy, "Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré: L'église et les reliques," in Michel Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident* (Paris: 2001), 13–24.

property.¹²⁴ It is only the *Life of Stephen*, notorious for both exaggeration and hazy chronology, that records:

In every village and town one could witness the weeping and lamentation of the pious ... sacred things trodden upon, [liturgical] vessels turned to other use, churches scraped down and smeared with ashes because they contained holy images. And wherever there were venerable images of Christ or the Mother of God or the saints, these were consigned to the flammers or were gouged out or smeared over.¹²⁵

Probably some of this happened in some places at some point during First Iconoclasm. However, it is the silence of most sources about a post-Hiereia surge in destruction and persecution that is more significant.

Perhaps this reflects widespread acceptance of Hierieia. Such a supposition is supported by Hierieia's very high attendance rate, and that no-one resigned their see in opposition. This could imply Constantine was successful in his seemingly thorough preparation, and/or that iconoclasm already had gained considerable purchase among the episcopacy. It might also reflect the success iconoclasts had already had in removing religious images from the public sphere. Or it could reflect the limits of enforcement. A combination of ambivalence, connivance, and a lack of means always constrained enforcement of imperial policy, and it is highly plausible that closet iconophiles were either unknown or left alone so long as they kept to themselves. Certainly, several iconophile hagiographies have their persecuted heroes receiving clandestine succour from sympathisers, such as the jailer's wife who smuggled icons to the imprisoned Stephen the Younger.¹²⁶ Finally, it might reflect the potential for flexible ambiguity in interpreting Hierieia's decrees. Given there was no outright command to destroy existing objects, a moderate could claim adherence by stopping the creation of new images and acts of veneration. Others might cover over rather than destroy existing images. Indeed, the quickest way to purge a church of images was to apply whitewash, which had the added benefit in the case of mosaics of being easily removable if the religious tide turned. Another option might have been to only remove images from the ground level

¹²⁴ Nicaea, 756.

¹²⁵ *Life of Stephen*, 26, trans. Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire: Sources and Documents* (London: 1986), 152.

¹²⁶ *Life of Stephen*, 57.

where they were more likely to attract acts of veneration, something we know happened in Second Iconoclasm.¹²⁷

If Hiereia, at least in the short term, brought only limited practical change, what was the point? After all, it was not inevitable that an ecumenical council would be called. Leo III had felt no need to convene one. Earlier iconoclasts seemed happy enough with the Second Commandment to justify their stance. Indeed, Constantine himself was in no hurry, waiting a decade into his reign to begin preparations. Something must have spurred Constantine to take this step.

The first factor was probably the civil war. Artabasdos must have given a reason for his coup. Assuming Theophanes' rhetoric bears any resemblance to reality, Constantine was attacked for general immorality and impiety. This included getting Patriarch Anastasios to declare that Constantine had denied Christ's Godhood.¹²⁸ To counter such slurs Constantine needed to demonstrate his orthodoxy, and one obvious way of doing so would be to convene an ecumenical council. Moreover, by championing iconoclasm Constantine reinforced his link with Leo, and hence his own legitimacy and Artabasdos' illegitimacy. However, the time gap means that something else must have happened.

A highly plausible additional spur was the plague of 746–47.¹²⁹ This hit Constantinople particularly hard, and to the Byzantine mind a plague's sudden, widespread, and arbitrary destruction could only be the result of divine wrath. As Nikephoros writes:

Those who were able to think aright judged that these [misfortunes] were inflicted by God's wrath inasmuch as the godless and impious ruler of the day and those who concurred with his lawless purpose dared to lay their hands on the holy images to the disgrace of Christ's Church.¹³⁰

127 See Chapter 7 in the present *Companion*. It is perhaps useful to compare this process with the far better evidenced episodes of iconoclasm in the Protestant Reformation. For instance, in 16th-century England, a relatively small and tightly governed realm, pressure from the centre was acute but intermittent, creating a remarkable mix of widespread outward conformity and clandestine resistance, of local foot-dragging and enthusiastic collaboration, of destruction, removal, covering over, and hiding, of official iconoclasm and unofficial theft and vandalism, all dependent on the interaction and interests of central power and local elites. For the classic study, see Edmund Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (2nd ed., London: 2005).

128 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 415.

129 David Turner, "The Politics of Despair: The Plague of 746–747 and Iconoclasm in the Byzantine Empire," *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 (1990), 419–34.

130 Nikephoros, *History*, 67.

It is very likely that contemporary iconophiles made this connection, and started arguing more volubly against iconoclasm. In particular, Byzantine iconophiles may have latched onto the works of John of Damascus to attack the iconoclasts, including John's explicit criticisms of Leo III.¹³¹ Indeed, some have seen Constantine's arguments as a direct response to John's.¹³² What is certain is that John of Damascus was singled out for extraordinary opprobrium at Hiereia, being anathematized no fewer than four times.¹³³

The iconophile challenge, perhaps sharpened by John of Damascus and certainly increased by the plague, required a response. Constantine took his time and prepared the ground well. New arguments and evidence were marshalled and given the ultimate stamp of approval by an ecumenical council. Moreover, Hiereia allowed Constantine to reaffirm his authority by posing as the defender of Orthodoxy and extirpator of heresy. He not only linked himself with Leo III, but with every pious emperor who had convened an ecumenical council. And it forced 338 bishops, some of the most important notables in the empire, to publicly support and praise Constantine and his recently crowned son Leo IV.

4.1 *Iconoclasm from Hiereia to the Death of Leo IV*

The next events that might be associated with iconoclasm are a series of persecutions in the 760s. The first named victim was a monk Andrew Kalybites, who, according to Theophanes, was beaten to death in 761/62. While this might have been connected to iconoclasm, Theophanes does not explicitly say so. Rather, Andrew was executed for insulting Constantine's piety.¹³⁴

The most famous set of persecutions took place 765–67. The first and most prominent victim was Stephen, a holy man and leader of a monastic community in Bithynia, whose *Life* is one of the most important, and polemical, sources for Constantine's reign.¹³⁵ According to the *Life*, Stephen was a staunch iconophile, whom, at various moments, Constantine attempted to persuade to support iconoclasm. He refused and was subjected to bouts of exile and imprisonment. Finally, Stephen was imprisoned in Constantinople, allegedly with 342 other monks who opposed Constantine. In 765 Stephen was dragged

131 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 183–89. Note that Brubaker and Haldon argue that John's works were a response to the *Peuseis*.

132 Noble, *Images*, 88–99.

133 Nicaea, 782.

134 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 432.

135 For Stephen, see Marie-France Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclisme byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d'Étienne le jeune* (Aldershot: 1999).

through the streets of Constantinople by a crowd of Constantine's supporters, killed, and dismembered.¹³⁶

There followed a more general persecution of iconophiles:

They brought under accusation many men invested with authority, charging them with worshipping holy icons, and killed them as if they had been found guilty of treason; some they subjected to different kinds of death, on others they inflicted unusual punishments, while a great multitude were exiled. Furthermore, they resolved that all the subjects [of the state] should affirm under oath that henceforth none of them would worship the icon of a saint. It is even said by eyewitnesses that the then archpriest of the City elevated the life-giving Cross and swore that he too was not a worshiper of the holy icons.¹³⁷

In summer 766:

[Constantine] held up to public scorn and dishonour the monastic habit in the Hippodrome by ordering that each monk hold a woman by the hand and so process through the Hippodrome while being spat upon and insulted by all the people. And ... [later] nineteen prominent dignitaries were brought to the Hippodrome and paraded for having made evil designs on the emperor. They had been falsely accused, but, in fact, the emperor bore a grudge because they were handsome and strong and were praised by everyone; and some of them because of their piety and for resorting to the aforementioned recluse [Stephen] whose sufferings they proclaimed in public. These men he killed ... after exposing these to scorn during the hippodrome games and causing them to be spat upon and cursed by all the people.¹³⁸

Patriarch Constantine was then deposed and exiled, before in 767 being paraded around the hippodrome, mutilated, and executed. After this:

[Constantine v] behaved with increased fury towards the holy churches. He sent his men to remove the celebrated stylite Peter from his rock and, since the latter did not yield to his doctrines, had him tied by the feet

¹³⁶ *Life of Stephen*, 68–70; Nikephoros, *History*, 81; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 436–37.

¹³⁷ Nikephoros, *History*, 81, altered. Mango translates καθοσιώσις, the crime the iconophiles were charged with, as sacrilege, but it is more usually translated as treason.

¹³⁸ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 437–38; Mango and Scott, 605; cf. Nikephoros, *History*, 83.

and ordered him too to be dragged alive along the Mese and thrown in the ditch of Pelagios. Others he tied up in sacks which he weighted with stones and commanded to be cast in the sea, and he went on blinding, amputating noses, scourging, and inventing every kind of torment for the pious.¹³⁹

How to explain this spurt of persecutions? In the traditional narrative these were iconophiles martyred for opposing an increasingly militant emperor.¹⁴⁰ However, the closer one examines the sources the more sceptical one becomes of iconoclasm's significance. While the *Life of Stephen* does explicitly name persecuted iconophiles, in Nikephoros and Theophanes no named person is categorically punished for their position on icons.¹⁴¹ Andrew was executed for insulting Constantine, Peter for denying his doctrines. Neither Nikephoros nor Theophanes explicitly call Stephen an iconophile, stating that he was executed, not for opposing iconoclasm, but because, "he had admonished many people to enter the monastic life and had persuaded them to scorn imperial dignities and moneys."¹⁴² The parade of monks and nuns are not explicitly condemned for anything, let alone being iconophiles. Their crime only becomes clear when we are told the subsequent parade of imperial officials was condemned for plotting against the emperor. This was also the alleged crime of Patriarch Constantine, a man unlikely to be a convinced iconophile given that he had been appointed at Hihereia. Stephen was also linked to the conspirators.

Clearly a major conspiracy had been uncovered and this was the reason for most of the punishment. We know nothing about the plot's causes. Perhaps the conspirators were ardent iconophiles, but neither Nikephoros nor Theophanes say this. Perhaps they were opponents of other more radical religious policies being formulated by Constantine. Nikephoros largely frames the persecutions as an attack on monasticism.¹⁴³ Theophanes has Constantine rejecting the cult of the Virgin, the cult of saints, and destroying relics.¹⁴⁴ Scholars are divided over whether this was merely iconophile propaganda or whether some,

139 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 442–43; Mango and Scott, 610–11.

140 Edward Martin, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London: 1930), 53–69.

141 As an example of the difference, whereas Theophanes has unspecified others rejecting ambiguous doctrines being tied up and thrown into the sea, the *Life* has just one, John, an abbot, suffering this penalty for refusing to trample on an icon of Christ and the Virgin; see *Life of Stephen*, 60.

142 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 437; Mango and Scott, 604.

143 Nikephoros, *History*, 80.

144 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 439.

including Constantine, were indeed sceptics.¹⁴⁵ What is pertinent here is that there is distinctly more evidence to link these persecutions with Constantine's potential policies regarding monks than with iconoclasm.

This is not to say that iconoclasm had no role. We are explicitly told that some officeholders were charged with the new heresy of worshipping icons, and variously punished. This could be evidence of iconophiles being punished for their beliefs, or that iconophiles were leading opponents of Constantine, or that the newly defined heresy of icon veneration provided a useful tool with which to charge opponents, real and imagined. We have no way of deciding the relative weight of these interpretations, but we can accept that some were charged as icon venerators in the mid-760s.

More significantly, there is the oath to not worship icons imposed by Constantine. While some sources only talk about an oath sworn by officials, a category that would include soldiers and clerics, most speak of an oath imposed on the entire population.¹⁴⁶ Either reading would suggest a significant expansion in enforcing the prohibition on icon veneration, though we should note that the oath says nothing about icon destruction. Even the narrower version would mean that post-765 the entire state and church apparatus were sworn anti-iconophiles. Oaths were a powerful tool. Oath-breaking, at least in a judicial context, was punished by amputation of the tongue.¹⁴⁷ Inevitably the swearing of such an oath, especially in the context of a failed conspiracy, implicitly acted as a loyalty test to the emperor as well as public agreement with iconoclast orthodoxy.

Our next event is unique, in that our texts describing iconoclasm are corroborated by physical remains. According to Theophanes:

the false patriarch Niketas scraped off the images in the small *secretum* of the Patriarchate, which were of mosaic, and those in the vault, which were in paint, he removed and plastered the faces of the other images.¹⁴⁸

The surviving mosaics, which demonstrate clear signs of the alteration, show that the images of saints were replaced with crosses. What is significant about

¹⁴⁵ Gero, *Constantine*, 122–65, argues for a radical Constantine v being behind these persecutions. Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 234–47, are doubtful, preferring the explanation of a foiled political plot. For more, see Chapter 10 in this *Companion*.

¹⁴⁶ For the sources that mention this oath, see Paul Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford: 1958), 13.

¹⁴⁷ *Ecloga*, 17.2.

¹⁴⁸ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 443.

this is that religious figural imagery had survived in the very nerve centre of the Byzantine Church until as late as the 760s. Moreover, this act was not ordered by the emperor, but the patriarch. Further, we should probably not view this primarily as a destructive act. Nikephoros, who dates this to 768/69, tells us the changes were made in the context of reconstruction, highly plausible given Byzantium's recent straitened circumstances and the potential damage caused by a significant earthquake in 740.¹⁴⁹ This was less an act of iconoclasm than one of rebuilding, during which the opportunity was taken to redecorate with crosses.

A similar pattern can be seen with the rebuilding of Hagia Eirene, the second church of Constantinople.¹⁵⁰ Severely damaged in the 740 earthquake, it was rebuilt, probably soon after 753. It is a substantial and richly decorated church, testifying to the considerable resources and technical expertise available in mid-8th-century Constantinople. Completely aniconic, its apse is dominated by a magnificent mosaic cross. The result is poorly described as iconoclasm; nothing after all was deliberately destroyed. Rather, once again we see promotion of the cross in the context of reconstruction.

A comparable but distinctly less securely dated sequence of changes occurred at the Koimesis Church in Nicaea.¹⁵¹ Photographs of the Virgin and Child apse mosaic that existed until the church's destruction in 1922 clearly demonstrate that it had replaced a cross, which plausibly in turn had replaced a figural image. While we do not know precisely when these changes happened, First Iconoclasm seems likely. If this is iconoclasm it was thoughtfully and delicately done, reflecting the promotion of the cross as much as the removal of religious figural imagery.

Something similar is found in a 9th-century miracle story, which relates as part of the history of the Church of the Virgin of the Chalkoprateia in Constantinople, a major centre of the Marian cult housing the Virgin's girdle, that Constantine V replaced a figural mosaic of Mary in the apse with a cross, which was then restored by the iconophile Patriarch Tarasios (784–806).¹⁵² Interestingly, despite mentioning that the church included images elsewhere, it only has Constantine removing them from the apse. While it is possible the story was invented to justify Tarasios' action, on balance it seems plausible. Certainly, it fits the pattern of iconoclasts favouring crosses in apses. Not only

149 Nikephoros, *History*, 86.

150 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 212–14.

151 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 202–06.

152 Wolfgang Lackner, "Ein byzantinisches Marienmirakel," *Byzantina* 13 (1985), 833–60; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 206–08.

did this remove heretical and idolatrous depictions of Christ and/or Mary and promote the cross instead, it did so in the space under which the altar was positioned, thereby reinforcing the iconoclasts' argument that the Eucharist was the true image of Christ.

Two further acts of iconoclasm are attributed to Constantine v in the *Life of Stephen*.¹⁵³ The first has the figural imagery at the Blachernai Church, another key Marian centre in Constantinople, being replaced with depictions of trees and animals.¹⁵⁴ For the *Life* this was a marker of Constantine's irreligiosity. However, this again looks more like a restoration of a significant church that eschewed figural imagery than an act of destructive iconoclasm. While some form of redecoration probably did occur at the Blachernai, the second supposed iconoclasm is far more dubious. The *Life* claims that Constantine replaced the images of the first six ecumenical councils on the Milion—the ceremonial milestone in Constantinople from which all roads were measured—with that of his favourite charioteer.¹⁵⁵ Considering that no one else mentions the story, and that the iconoclast argument at Hiereia was explicitly linked to the previous ecumenical councils this is almost certainly a myth.

Finally, a sequence of events ca. 770–72 is often linked to iconoclasm. According to Theophanes:

Michael Lachanodrakon, *strategos* of the *Thrakesians*, ... sold off all the male and female monasteries, all their holy vessels, ... and all their other possessions and paid their value to the emperor. Whatever books he found containing stories of monks ... he burnt. And whenever it appeared that anyone had a saint's relic ... this too was consigned to the fire, while its possessor was punished for impiety. Many monks he killed ... and a numberless multitude he blinded. In the case of some he smeared their chins with liquid wax and set fire to them ... while others he subjected to torments and had them exiled. ... When the wicked emperor heard of this, he wrote him a letter of thanks, saying: "I have found in you a man after my own heart who carries out all my wishes."¹⁵⁶

Laying aside the probable hyperbole, at no point are icons mentioned. The monks are punished simply for being monks. Furthermore, the whole episode was undertaken on the initiative of the local general. The story assumes that no

¹⁵³ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 208–210.

¹⁵⁴ *Life of Stephen*, 29.

¹⁵⁵ *Life of Stephen*, 65.

¹⁵⁶ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 445–46; Mango and Scott, 615.

specific instructions had been given, only that Constantine was pleased by the actions. As such, though it gives no direct evidence for iconoclasm, it provides an insight into how action on the ground was not necessarily driven by imperial commands but the decisions of local officials.

Constantine v died in 775. Theophanes celebrated:

Thus he ended his life, polluted as he was with much Christian blood, with the invocation of demons to whom he sacrificed, with the persecution of the holy churches and of true and immaculate faith, furthermore with the slaying of monks and the profanation of monasteries: in all manner of evil he had reached a pinnacle no less than Diocletian and the other ancient tyrants.¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, the one thing Constantine is not explicitly condemned for is iconoclasm. Indeed, overall more space is devoted by our iconophile texts to condemning Constantine's supposed anti-monasticism than to detailing Constantine's promotion of iconoclast theology, persecution of iconophiles, and destruction of images. Moreover, despite lavishing the greatest detail and rhetoric to religious matters in their works it is clear from Nikephoros and Theophanes that religious affairs in their entirety only comprised part of Constantine's reign. Constantine spent far more time campaigning against Bulgars and Arabs than icons and iconophiles. We should be wary of seeing image-destruction as a defining feature of Constantine's reign. Indeed, scholars are increasingly aware that Constantine was a prominent patron and builder, especially in Constantinople.¹⁵⁸

Constantine's son and successor Leo IV is usually described as more moderate than his father thanks in part to this passage in Theophanes:

For a short time [Leo IV] appeared to be pious and a friend of the holy Mother of God and of the monks; for which reasons he appointed from among monks metropolitans of the foremost sees.

This says nothing about icons. Indeed, Theophanes mentions iconoclasm only twice during Leo's reign, both for events in 780.¹⁵⁹ First, the new patriarch Paul supposedly protested against his appointment due to the prevailing heresy of iconoclasm. If he did, it did not stop him accepting the post. Second, several

¹⁵⁷ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 448; Mango and Scott, 619.

¹⁵⁸ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 161–63, 212–27.

¹⁵⁹ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 453.

eunuchs were arrested for worshipping icons, scourged, tonsured, and imprisoned. Subsequently one died in prison, acclaimed as a martyr by Theophanes, while the others lived as monks. Once again this looks primarily like the punishing of a plot rather than a crackdown on iconophiles. Whatever the truth, it is a reminder that Hiereia remained in force and that iconophiles could be punished for heresy if they possessed or venerated icons.

5 Conclusions

In 780 iconoclasm seemed secure. Legitimized by the Isaurian dynasty's longevity, success, and popularity, for a quarter-century it had been authorized by an ecumenical council. The entire episcopacy had been appointed under iconoclast emperors. At the least, all soldiers, officials, and bishops had sworn not to worship icons. Doubtless committed iconophiles remained, but there is no evidence of any organized resistance inside the empire. Monks, who were always better able to resist imperial pressure than bishops, might have individually provided the most ardent opponents to iconoclasm. However, the idea that monks as a group were the great defenders of icons is a myth.¹⁶⁰ Most monks accepted iconoclasm.

Yet by 787 iconoclasm was a condemned heresy. That is a subject for the following chapter, but the rapidity of the change raises questions. Perhaps support for icons was widespread, just waiting for an opportune moment. However, there is scant evidence for this, and even if true would imply that most iconophiles were unprepared to risk open defiance. More likely, support for iconoclasm was limited, though unlike at Hiereia there was resistance among the *Tagmatic* troops and some bishops to the change in policy.¹⁶¹ Indeed, the most plausible conclusion is that while impassioned and convinced iconophiles and iconoclasts existed, most Byzantines were ambivalent, apathetic, and prepared to submit to the powers that be.

This reinforces the idea that First Iconoclasm was essentially an imperial heresy. Constantine V was iconoclasm's preeminent theologian, the convenor of Hiereia, and imposer of an oath against icon worship. Byzantine iconoclasm possibly began among bishops, but it was Leo III's support that transformed mutterings into an international controversy. Evidently the emperors did not act alone. They might have acted seldomly. They might have been moderate.

160 Kathryn Ringrose, "Monks and Society in Iconoclastic Byzantium," *Byzantine Studies* 6 (1979), 130–51; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 234–47.

161 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 461–62.

Their words probably were enforced variously by different actors across the empire. But it seems beyond doubt that they were the principal actors.

Iconoclasm was also only a part of imperial policy, and probably not the most significant. Leo and Constantine spent far more time fighting wars than iconophiles. Indeed, their legitimacy and popularity were based on their military success buttressed by the careful dissemination of an ideology that claimed they were divinely appointed rulers in the mould of Old Testament kings, who maintained God's favour through upholding justice and morally purifying the new Chosen People. Iconoclasm obviously chimed with this. However, it was just one strand.

Likewise, icon destruction and condemnation of icon veneration were not the only religious policies of those labelled "iconoclasts." Promotion of the cross was a notable part of Isaurian propaganda before iconoclasm. At least by the 750s iconoclasts were promoting the Eucharist as the true image of Christ. The saints were to be held forth as moral exemplars rather than dispensers of miracles.¹⁶² Some radicals might have been sceptics of the cults of Mary, the saints, and relics, or at least their words and deeds could be portrayed as such by iconophiles. Certainly, as Peter Brown evocatively argued there was an argument over what was holy, in which "iconoclasts" sought to promote those symbols and rituals that were grounded in scripture and more controllable by church and state.¹⁶³ Icons were central to this debate, but were not the be-all and end-all.

Iconoclasm was also a distinctly episodic phenomenon. Considerable argument took place in the 720s, culminating in 730 with a change of patriarch and Leo issuing some sort of statement. Dispute again happened in the run-up to Hiereia in 754, where iconoclasm was endorsed as official church dogma, and iconophiles condemned as heretics subject to punishment. In the mid-760s some iconophiles were persecuted and an oath against icon-worship imposed in a complex series of events that also included a failed conspiracy, and a possible radicalisation of religious policy. That is not to say no acts of iconoclasm took place outside these times, we just have little evidence for it. As such it is impossible to know how far these peaks of activity deviated from the background norm.

Just how much destruction was there altogether? Statements of generalised destruction abound, but our hostile sources clearly exaggerate. Specific instances are rarer, and many are probably later inventions. Certainly, there is

162 Milton Anastos, "The Ethical Theory Formulated by the Iconoclasts in 754 and 815," *DOP* 8 (1954), 151–60.

163 Brown, "Iconoclastic Controversy."

no secure evidence for the emperors destroying any particular icon. Hierieia did not outright command the destruction of all religious figural imagery, and even laid down limits. However, it did admit some iconoclasm had happened. Religious figural imagery created before iconoclasm that survives to this day, such as the mosaics of Hagios Demetrios in Thessalonica, are certain proof that destruction was not total.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, the changes in the *secrētum/sekreton* of Hagia Sophia are certain proof that something did happen.

Nicaea's *Acta* epitomise the dilemma facing any attempt to judge the extent of destruction. On the one hand there is an explicit statement about generalised destruction:

With malicious intent they laid on lawless hands, intending to abolish the painting of sacred images. By digging out whatever was of mosaic and obliterating all encaustic work in colours they made indecorous the decorousness of the sacred churches; as well as this they consigned to fire panels in commemoration of Christ our God and his saints; in a word, they despoiled and ravaged our churches.¹⁶⁵

On the other, the only specific examples given are a few manuscripts, which had passages that supported icon veneration excised by the iconoclasts.¹⁶⁶ The most telling example was one manuscript that had a silver cover still decorated with images of saints. The iconoclasts had left the images while removing the words supporting, to their mind, idolatry. Interestingly, in the long list of anathemas given includes those who preached against icons, who called them idols, and did not kiss them.¹⁶⁷ Those who destroyed icons are not explicitly anathematized.

Overall, we can conclude that some iconoclasm definitely happened, but that it fell short of the general, imperially-organized destruction many of our sources claim. On the other hand, we can also conclude that by 780 iconoclasm had reshaped the Byzantine public sphere. Many of the most important churches in the empire were now definitely devoid of religious figural imagery, at the very least in the apse. Likewise coins and seals. Instead, the cross was ubiquitous.

To conclude, First Iconoclasm was significant at the time. Some objects were destroyed. Some were persecuted. Considerable argument occurred. It did

¹⁶⁴ Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 412.

¹⁶⁵ Nicaea, 860; Price, 581.

¹⁶⁶ Nicaea, 572–580.

¹⁶⁷ Nicaea, 52–54, 828.

complicate Byzantine relations with Rome and the Franks. It was of political importance, bound up as it was with competing notions of what an emperor should do and Isaurian ideology. However, it was just one strand of Byzantine life. It was only through the progressive rewriting of history by the iconophiles that the period became dominated by iconoclasm. Thus, in the end the significance of First Iconoclasm was as much the creation of those who were to come as those who lived through it.

The Iconophile Intermission and Second Iconoclasm, 780–843

Marie-France Auzépy

The period between 780 and 843 does not shine by comparison with the preceding period. The homogeneity of the Isaurian period is striking: longevity of its reigns, its reforms, and its military victories. In contrast, the period between 780 and 843 is marked by heterogeneity: rapid turnover of emperors, defeats, civil wars. Three emperors reigned during the 63 years between 717 and 780 while there were seven during an equal span of years between 780 and 843. The three Isaurians died in their beds (although there is some doubt concerning the last of these, Leo IV, whose reign was short); most of the seven who followed died violently. The blinding of Constantine VI, on his mother's orders, led to his death; Nicephorus I and his son died during combat or as a result of it; Leo V was assassinated. Of the seven, one was a woman, which was absolutely new in the Roman Empire, by nature a military power. When, with amazing skilfulness, Irene, widow of Leo IV, mother and murderess of Constantine VI, became the sole ruler, she was obliged to govern through the eunuchs of the Bedchamber, whose role became decisive during her reign. It should be added that during those 63 years Byzantine armies twice fought with each other in bloody civil wars: in 793 when Constantine VI attacked the army of the *Armeniakon*, and between 820 and 823 when Michael II, based in Constantinople, aided only by the *Opsikion* and the *Armeniakon*, faced Thomas the Slav who held the remainder of the Empire.

The difference is just as great as far as foreign affairs are concerned. The Isaurians had freed Asia Minor from Arab-Muslim armies and consolidated the Taurus frontier. They had restrained the Bulgars and protected that frontier by fortifying and repopulating Thrace. In contrast, in 782 Harun al-Rashid at the head of a great army was encamped opposite Constantinople at Chrysopolis, and although her generals resisted the attack, Irene negotiated and paid a tribute to the Caliphate. In 813, Krum, the Bulgar Khan, besieged Constantinople after having killed an emperor on the battlefield and ravaged Thrace, taking its cities and *kastra*, collecting captives and booty. To this distressing panorama should be added the creation of a rival empire in the West at Christmas 800,

when Charlemagne was crowned by the Pope of Rome and recognized by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.¹

Only the reign of Theophilos (829–42), who died in his bed at the end of the period, seems to have been spared such extreme tensions, even though it was marked in 838 by the Arabs' conquest and destruction of Amorion, capital of the *Anatolikon* Theme and birthplace of the dynasty. Were it not for the question of iconoclasm that created chronological breaks in the 8th and 9th centuries, it would be possible to consider his reign as continuous with that of his son and successor, Michael III (842–67).²

In the sources as in historiography, the years between 780 and 843 are indeed presented as marked and even organized by religious questions. In less than 65 years the official faith changed course three times. Isaurian iconoclasm, instituted by the Council of Hieria (754) was abandoned at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, at the instigation of Empress Irene. In 815, it was reinstituted by Emperor Leo V who gave back force of law to the Council of Hieria before being finally abandoned in 843 by Empress Theodora and her young son Michael III after the death of Theophilos. However, it is not clear whether iconoclasm was as significant for people at the time as it is for us. Theosteriktos, a monk who wrote the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, an enlightening source for the start of the reign of Leo V, probably written in 828 or 829, objects to those who treat iconoclasm as a question of no importance.³ This is evidence that at the start of the 9th century there were people, including some monks, who considered that iconoclasm was not a fundamental question. But their opinions have not survived, and historians can only write history from the sources they have. And the sources that have come down to us were all written by churchmen: clerics or monks who were fierce supporters of the cult of icons and who present a history of the period seen and considered from the point of view of the victorious Church of 787. Hence, for this particular moment of Byzantine history there is no history other than a history of the Church written by the iconophile victors.

1 For the history of events during the period, see Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival: 780–842* (Palo Alto: 1988); Ralph-Joannes Lilie and Ilse Rochow, *Byzanz unter Eirene und Konstantin VI. (780–802)* (Berliner Byzantinistische Studien) 2 (Frankfurt: 1996).

2 See Juan Signes Codoñer, *The Emperor Theophilus and the East, 829–842: Court and Frontier in Byzantium in the Last Phase of Iconoclasm* (Farnham: 2014).

3 *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* (BHG 1341), *Acta Sanctorum* April. 1 (Antwerp: 1675), XXII–XXXII, here §27, XXVIII. For the date: Marie-France Auzépy, “Les monastères,” in Bernard Geyer and Jacques Lefort (eds.), *La Bithynie au Moyen Âge* (Réalités byzantines) 9 (Paris: 2003), 431–58, 433, n. 24.

This history of the Church became and remained the “history” of that moment, in both Eastern and Western historiography. In the East because, from 843, the Church founded its definitive orthodoxy on images, which implied that iconoclasm was to be demonized. Hence, reading the sources of the period with a critical eye becomes an act against the faith and against the Church, something which few historians in the Balkans, in Greece, and in Russia have been or are ready to take on. In the West, the Roman Church, for once in accord with the Orthodox Church, equally accepted the “history of iconoclasm,” but for other reasons than in Constantinople. In the 750s, the papacy’s alliance with the Carolingians allowed the Church of Rome to create papal states on Byzantine territory. Denouncing the Isaurian emperors then in power as heretics was necessary in making these appropriations seem righteous. This state of affairs was supported in the first decades of the 9th century by the belief in the *translatio imperii* from East to West which legitimated the creation of the new Carolingian empire. At the time of the Renaissance, the fact that Reformed Churches approved of the iconoclasts made them once again hateful to all of Catholic Europe so that modern historians have taken up the edifying story told by these iconophile sources.⁴ It is only recently that these sources have not been taken literally but rather analysed critically and tested against Carolingian, Syriac, and Arab sources, allowing the emergence of a more secular history.⁵

Regarding sources, the period 780–843 has a special position. Its early years during the reigns of Leo IV, Constantine, and Irene, are documented by only a single contemporary source, the so-called *Chronicle of Theophanes*.⁶ The identity of its author is hotly disputed but not its date; all agree that it was written shortly after the last year it covers, 813.⁷ It cannot be compared to any other Greek source because the only even closely contemporaneous account, the

4 Ilse Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin v. (741–775): Materialien zu seinem Leben und Nachleben*, (Berliner Byzantinistische Studien) 1 (Frankfurt: 1994), 146–171. For the history of the period seen from a Catholic—and French—point of view, see for instance, Louis Maimbourg, *Histoire de l’hérésie des iconoclastes et de la translation de l’Empire aux François* (Paris: 1686); from both a Protestant and enlightened point of view, see Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: 1788, rev. 1845), chap. XLIX, 1.

5 Ilse Rochow, *Byzanz im 8. Jahrhundert in der Sicht des Theophanes: Quellenkritisch-historischer Kommentar zu den Jahren 715–813*, (Berliner Byzantinistische Arbeiten) 57 (Berlin: 1991); Marie-France Auzépy, “State of Emergency (700–850),” in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: 2008), 251–291; Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: 2011).

6 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. Karl de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, 1 (Leipzig: 1883); English trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford: 1997).

7 See *Studies in Theophanes*, ed. Marek Jankowiak and Federico Montinaro (Paris: 2015).

Chronicle of George the Monk, which stops in 840, essentially reproduces the *Chronicle of Theophanes* combined with passages from anti-iconoclast pamphlets.⁸ The historical account of these reigns is therefore exclusively dependent on the *Chronicle of Theophanes*. However, for the religious history of the period, we have two invaluable contemporary sources, one concerning theology and the history of the Church, the *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), now published by Erich Lambez.⁹ The other is focused on monasticism and its place in society, the *Catechesis* and the *Letters* of Theodore Studite.¹⁰ To this can be added the later theological works of the Patriarch Nicephorus, who refuted the iconoclastic theses at length in his *Antirrhetici* and in the *Refutatio et Eversio* of the council of 815.¹¹

In contrast, the end of the reign of Nicephorus, that of Michael I, and the start of the reign of Leo V are rather well documented. Beyond the *Chronicle of Theophanes* which continues to 813, there is also the *Chronicle of 811* recounting the Byzantine defeat by the Bulgars, and the *Scriptor Incertus*, probably composed under Michael II, recounting the disastrous Bulgar campaign of Michael I and Krum's siege of Constantinople, followed by the account of Leo V's religious reversal.¹² There are also two hagiographic texts describing this reversal, the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* and later, the *Life of the Patriarch Nicephorus*.¹³

Sources concerning the end of the period pose other problems. The chronicles recounting the reigns of Leo V, Michael II, and Theophilos were all written under the Macedonians at the earliest. Two of them, the *Genesios* and

8 *Georgii Monachi Chronicon*, ed. Karl de Boor (Leipzig: 1904); rev. ed. Peter Wirth (Stuttgart: 1978). The generally accepted date of the *Chronicle* (after 866) has been questioned by Dmitry Afinogenov who places it in the years of Methodius' patriarchate (843–847). Dmitry Afinogenov, "The Date of Georgios Monachos Reconsidered," *BZ* 92 (1999): 437–447. See Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (ca 680–850): *The Sources. An Annotated Survey*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 7 (Aldershot: 2001), 172–173.

9 *Concilium Universale Nicaenum secundum*, ed. Erich Lambez, *Acta Conciliorum oecumenicorum*, Series secunda, Volumen tertium, I, II, III (Berlin: 2008, 2012, 2016).

10 Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 258 and n. 64.

11 Nicephorus, *Antirrhetici*, PG 100: 205–533; *Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815*, ed. Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, *CCSG* 33 (Turnhout: 1997).

12 Ivan Dujčev, "La chronique byzantine de l'an 811," *TM* 1 (1965), 205–254, ed. and trans. 211–217; *Scriptor Incertus de Leone Armenio* in *Leonis Grammatici Chronographia*, ed. Immanuel Bekker, *CSHB* (Bonn: 1842), 335–362; Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 179–180.

13 *Life of Nicephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople* by Ignatios the Deacon (BHG 1335), ed. Karl de Boor, *Nicephori opuscula historica* (Leipzig: 1880), repr. (New York: 1975), 139–217; trans. Elizabeth A. Fisher, in *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington DC: 1998), 41–142.

Theophanes Continuatus, were undertaken on the orders of Constantine VII and are therefore not likely to praise the father and grandfather of Michael III who was assassinated by Basil I, Constantine's grandfather.¹⁴ Furthermore, these chronicles are often mutually contradictory, and the connections between them are still the subject of lively dispute.¹⁵ All this means that even if there are more sources than for preceding reigns, little is known for certain about the reigns of Michael II and Theophilos. They remain in a kind of documentary fog created by the discord among sources and historians' varying, not to say contradictory, interpretations. Starting with the *Life of Stephen the younger* from 807–09, there are many hagiographic texts, becoming even more frequent after the Triumph of Orthodoxy.¹⁶ They allow light to be shed on some particular points, but others, like the modalities of the final restoration of iconophilism in 843, remain ill-understood.

With respect to the period between 780 and 815, generally known as the "Iconophile Intermission," it goes without saying that as far as religious history is concerned, the most important element is the council which the Empress Irene and her son Constantine VI called in Nicaea in 787 (Nicaea II) and which, for the first time in the Christian world, imposed the cult of icons by abolishing the decisions of the iconoclast council of Hieria (754). It imposed rather than "re-established" it, as is often said. It is true that Nicaea re-established practices outlawed by Hieria, but the phrase "re-established the cult of images" can also be understood as indicating the return of Christianity to a tradition unhappily interrupted by the iconoclast prohibition. That is the sense that the Second Council of Nicaea attributed to its decisions. As a consequence, by claiming that it "re-established" images, one adopts the mental framework of the Council. However, before the Council of 754, the worship of images was not a fact of faith based on a conciliar decision, but rather a freely chosen pious practice among some of the faithful, and not among others, since the Church had no official position on the question. We should keep in mind that the cult of images included gestures, kneeling with one's forehead to the ground (*proskynesis*), and kissing, as well as other practices like burning incense and lighting

14 *Chronographiae quae Theophanis continuati nomine fertur Libri I-IV*, eds. Jeffrey Michael Featherstone and Juan Signes Codoñer, *CFHB* 53 (Berlin, Boston: 2015).

15 See Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 173–78, and most recently Constantin Zuckerman, "Emperor Theophilos and Theophobos in Three Tenth-Century Chronicles: Discovering the 'Common Source,'" *REB* 75 (2017), 101–50, showing that Pseudo-Symeon is most probably the source of *Genesios* and *Theophanes Continuatus*.

16 Stephanos Efthymiadis, "Hagiography from the 'Dark Age' to the Age of Symeon Metaphrastes (Eighth-Tenth Centuries)," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Farnham: 2011), 95–142.

candles, which caused the Isaurians to consider it idolatrous.¹⁷ The expression “re-establishing images” also suggests that the decision of 787 was expected by the population who was generally in favour of images and pleased to be able once again to worship them with usual gestures which had been forbidden under the iconoclasts. This overview, drawn from the sources, cannot be accurate. The empire’s subjects had lived in an iconoclast environment since 730. They had been forced, since 754, not to possess icons and not to worship them under pain of anathema and criminal prosecution.¹⁸ It had been made clear to them that worshipping icons was a form of idolatry which angered God and threatened the people of God, the new Israel, that is themselves, with disasters and captivity. Such a supposition was far from theoretical when Arab armies were roaming about Asia Minor. They had noticed that God looked favourably on imperial policies since He gave the Isaurians long reigns and brilliant victories.¹⁹ They had sealed their iconoclast commitment with an oath in 766.²⁰ By 787 the empire’s subjects had been iconoclasts for more than 30 years, time for a generation. The decision to abandon iconoclasm, far from simply bringing back the calm that prevailed before the storm, overturned an established situation. It meant that the same bishops who had spent 30 years explaining to their flock that prostrating themselves before icons was an idolatrous practice that would call the wrath of God down upon them, now needed to explain that to please Him they were now required to prostrate themselves before icons. In so doing, they compelled the people to perjure themselves, even while the

17 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO II* 3, III, 634, 610–612, 696–700; *Admonition of the Old Man*, ed. M. B. Melioranskij, *Georgij Kiprjanin i Ioann Ierusalimljanin*, (*Zapiski ist.-fil. fakulteta imp. Universiteta*) 59 (St. Petersburg: 1901), V-XXXIX, here XI.

18 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO II* 3, III, 750.

19 The *Chronicle of Theophanes* reports that in 812, following the terrible defeat of Byzantine armies by the Bulgar Khan Krum, many people in Constantinople “beatified” Constantine V for having been victorious over the Bulgars thanks to his piety. (Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 496, trans. Mango, Scott, 679). The Patriarch Nicephorus, in the *Antirrhetici*, regrets that, at the time when he was writing (doubtless between 818 and 820), bishops and priests praised Constantine V and credited his piety for the length of his reign and his victories over the barbarians (Nicephorus, *Antirrhetici*, III 69–72: PG 100, 501–509). According to the *Scriptor Incertus*, Leo V wished to restore iconoclasm so that he may have a long reign and the empire might once again victorious over its enemies (*Scriptor Incertus*, ed. Bekker, 346, 349, 352, 355, 359).

20 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 437, trans. Mango, Scott, 604; Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango, *Nikephorus, Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History*, CFHB 13 (Washington: 1990), §81.

penalty for perjury was having the tongue cut.²¹ Discarding iconoclasm was in fact revolutionary and had a slim chance of being readily accepted.

Why then was it undertaken? Interpreting the sources allows us to propose some paths that might lead to answers. The attempted usurpation of 766 which drew together a good part of the imperial establishment shows that some of the *archontes* (officeholders) did not agree with the policies of Constantine v, and the iconoclast oath demanded then by the emperor is proof that he was not sure how attached to iconoclasm all his subjects were.²² There is no way to identify the precise social origins of the mutinous *archontes*, which would help us to know if their behaviour was prompted by an opposition between the old landed aristocracy imbued with classical culture and the new military aristocracy created by the Isaurians and marked by a technical culture.²³ It would be tempting to suggest that the religious reversal was motivated by a social class that had lost its prerogatives as a result of Isaurian innovations. In the absence of sources, the only support for such a view lies in the old elite social origins of the patriarch chosen by the Empress Irene.²⁴ Moreover, it does not appear that religious images were of primary importance to the Empress who was the key agent of the change in religious policy since, after 787, she did not order any such images to appear either on the coins she issued jointly with her son, or those in her name alone. On the latter, her own portrait appeared on both sides, something no previous emperor had ever done. In 843, in contrast, a representation of Christ appeared on Michael III's *nomismata*, concurrent

21 *Ecloga*, 17. 2, ed. and German trans. Ludwig Burgmann, *Ecloga, Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstantinos' v.* (Frankfurt: 1983), 226.

22 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 436–443, trans. Mango, Scott, 604–611, cf. Rochow, *Theophanes*, 186–207; Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, ed. and trans. Mango, §79–84. On the conspiracy: Marie-France Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre: Introduction, édition et traduction*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 3 (Aldershot: 1997), 22–33; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 234–243.

23 On the cultured anti-Isaurian old aristocracy, see, for example, the sermon on the siege of 717 attributed to the Patriarch Germanos (Venance Grumel, “Homélie de Saint Germain sur la délivrance de Constantinople,” *REB* 16 [*Mélanges Sévérien Salaville*] (1958):183–205), written in an extremely classical style, in which Emperor Leo III is not even named; see Paul Speck, “Klassizismus im achten Jahrhundert? Die Homelie des Patriarchen Germanos über die Rettung Konstantinopels,” *REB* 44 (1986), 209–227. For the military aristocracy born on the field of battle in the Isaurian period, see Jean-Claude Cheynet, “L’aristocratie byzantine (VIIIe-XIIIe siècle),” *Journal des Savants* 2 (2000), 282–322, here 288–290; trans. in idem, *The Byzantine Aristocracy and its Military Function* (Aldershot: 2006), 7–11.

24 See Stephanos Efthymiadis, *The Life of the Patriarch Tarasios by Ignatius the Deacon, Introduction, Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Aldershot: 1998), 6–11; Claudia Ludwig, “Tarasios,” in *Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit*, ed. Ralph-Johannes Lilie, (Berliner Byzantinistische Studien) 5 (Frankfurt: 1999), 57–108, 57–62.

with the reestablishment of images.²⁵ One might infer that the real reason for Irene's choice was her own ambition: she wanted to rule in her own name and, being a woman, while she could not call upon the army, she could count on the Church with a patriarch by her side. That is what she did.

The author of the *Chronicle of Theophanes*, employing terms similar to those of the *sacra* of Constantine and Irene read at Nicaea II, notes that the Patriarch Paul retired to a monastery on 31 August 784 due to illness, taking on the monastic habit without first notifying the emperors,²⁶ and that Irene sent him a delegation of patricians (*patrikioi*) and senators to whom he said: "Unless an ecumenical council takes place and the error that is in your midst is corrected, you will not find salvation." Soon after he died, regretting his own error in accepting iconoclasm. Irene then assembled the "people" in the *Magnaaura*; they put forward the name of the head of the imperial chancellery, *asekretis* Tarasios.²⁷ He in turn gave a long speech pointing out that he was a layman, and declaring that he would accept the position only if an ecumenical council was called to unite the divided Church.²⁸ There was general agreement that a council should take place, and Tarasios was installed on 25 December 784.²⁹

This edifying tale can mean only one thing: Patriarch Paul had been relieved of his duties by the empress who sent him to the convent where he had the good taste to die. If Paul had accepted the empress' wishes, he would have abandoned iconoclasm and maintained his office. He did not do this since he died "regretting that his soul was darkened by heresy." Moreover, it is incredible that a patriarch would vacate his duties without informing the emperor. In place of Paul, the empress chose a layman, *asekretis* Tarasios, which was in contravention to the ecclesiastical law, at least that prevailing in Rome since the Lateran Council of 769, and which no previous emperor had ever done.³⁰

25 Philip Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, III, 1 (Washington D.C.: 1973), 347, 456, pl. xv and xxviii.

26 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 44–46.

27 On this person, see Ludwig, "Tarasios," in Lilie, *Patriarchen*, 57–108; *PmbZ* 7235.b.

28 This discourse also occurs, sometimes in the same terms, sometimes in slightly different terms, in a text titled "A Short Account of the Events Before the Council," placed at the head of the *Acts* of the Second Council of Nicaea (*Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 8–12). Lamberz thinks that the *Chronicle* and this text, added to the *Acts* later, have the same source (*ibid.*, 8). Considering its contents, that common source might well have been written by Tarasios himself.

29 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 457–460, trans. Mango, Scott, 631–634.

30 Prohibition of ordination of a layman as a bishop at the Lateran Council (769): *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. Louis Duchesne, I (Paris: 1886), 476. As for Irene's choice, we agree with the analysis of Afinogenov who interprets the fight against iconoclasm as an opportunity for the Patriarchate of Constantinople to declare its power with respect to the emperor,

Let us point out that the text of the *De Cerimoniis* describes the choice of the patriarch as follows: the metropolitans propose three names to the emperor who chooses from among them, unless he approves of none of these, in which case he is free to choose someone else.³¹ There surely were churchmen among the candidates, such as Sabas, the abbot of Stoudios, which can be affirmed by reading *Actio 1* of the Second Council of Nicaea.³² The empress imposed her choice not only on the Church but also, according to the *Chronicle of Theophanes*, in a public meeting, on the “people.” As the sources do not mention a meeting of the metropolitans, it is not possible to know whether or not such a meeting took place. The word “people” is difficult to interpret. In the *De Cerimoniis*, the emperor’s nomination of the patriarch is publicly confirmed at the *Magnaaura* before the Senate and high Church officials. Was Irene the initiator of this ceremony or did she only apply existing protocol? Did she enlarge the public attending the ceremony at the *Magnaaura*? There is no answer to these questions. The attention the *Chronicle of Theophanes* and the *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* give to Tarasios’ speech shows that in any case, the meeting of an ecumenical council was the essential element of this exceptional investiture, whether Irene demanded it as a condition of naming Tarasios or he demanded it before accepting the patriarchate.

It was vital that the council be ecumenical so that it should override the legitimacy of the Council of Hieria and that its position be unassailable. At the request of the empress and the new patriarch, Pope Hadrian I sent his legates Peter, the archpriest of the Church of Rome, and Peter, abbot of the Greek monastery of Saint Sabas in Rome.³³ They brought missives that were read at the council but which are only partially preserved in the *Acts*. The passages in which the pope objected to the Isaurian annexation of the sees of Illyricum, Calabria, and Sicily to the jurisdiction of Constantinople and informed Tarasios that his election was unacceptable, were suppressed, most likely at the end of the 9th century since they have been preserved in Anastasius the

but his presentation of the empress’ “discretion” with respect to the nomination of Tarasios is not convincing. See Dimitri Afinogenov, “Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐπίσκοπον ἔχει, The Rise of the Patriarchal Power in Byzantium from Nicaenum II to Epanagoga, Part I: From Nicaenum II to the Second Outbreak of Iconoclasm,” *Erytheia* 15 (1994), 45–65, here 47.

31 *De Cerimoniis* II 14, ed. I. Reiske (Bonn: 1829), 564–566; trans. Ann Moffatt and Maxeme Tall, *Constantine Porphyrogenetos, The Book of Ceremonies* (Canberra: 2012), 564–565.

32 Marie-France Auzépy, “La place des moines à Nicée II (787),” *Byzantion* 58 (1988), 5–21, here 12–13, 21; repr. in eadem, *L’histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris: 2007), 45–57, here 50–51, 57. *PmbZ* 6442; *PBE* Sabas 4.

33 First mentioned during the council: *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 18.

Librarian's Latin translation of the *Acts* in 873.³⁴ John, *syncellus* of the Patriarch of Antioch and Thomas, abbot and priest, who appear regularly in the *Acts* as *topoteretes* (representatives) of the Eastern patriarchs, are another matter.³⁵ The letter they presented to the Council as their letter of credence sent by the Eastern sees was written by an anonymous Palestinian monk.³⁶ It is filled with errors and Lamberz considers it a literary fiction.³⁷ They also gave the council a twenty-years-old synodical letter from a patriarch of Jerusalem, Theodore, allegedly written for the occasion.³⁸ The official acts reproduced in the *Acts*, the emperors' *sacra*, and Tarasios' letter to the pope, never name them as legal representatives of the Eastern patriarchs.³⁹ The author of the *Chronicle of Theophanes* is aware of this. He says that the pope sent legates, whose names he provides; with respect to the Eastern Church, he says only that the empress and the patriarch invited John from Antioch and Thomas from Alexandria.⁴⁰ It means that Tarasios passed off two Eastern clerics as official envoys of Eastern seats. Theodore Studite sums up the situation admirably by saying that they had not been sent by patriarchs, but that they were sent "the better to convince the people living as heretic to become orthodox by having convened an apparently ecumenical council."⁴¹

In this case, it is possible to see the way the historical doxa was constructed which held that all the patriarchs sent legates to the Second Council of Nicaea, whose ecumenical nature was consequently indisputable. By depending on the knowingly false presentation of the *Acts*, later sources completed the picture. In Ignatius the Deacon's *Life of Tarasios*, written seventy years after the council, Thomas is presented as the envoy of Politianos, the patriarch of

34 Late 9th-century dating suggested by Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, XLV–L and LIII–LIV.

35 First mentioned during the council: *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 18. Following this they were referred to in these terms each time they addressed the Council.

36 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 244.

37 Marie-France Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclasme byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d'Étienne le Jeune* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 5 (Aldershot: 1999), 212–215; Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, LV.

38 Auzépy, *L'hagiographie*, 218–227; Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 254–268.

39 In the *sacra* of the emperors the two Peters are called *topoteretes* of Pope Hadrian, while John and Thomas are spoken of as bearers of the letters sent by "the bishops and priests of the Eastern diocese" (*Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 48^{13–21}). In the letter he sent to Pope Hadrian I after the Council, Tarasios is very cautious, saying only that he and the empress called honorable men of the East who were then in Constantinople to the council (*Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, III, 928^{2–5}).

40 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 461, trans. Mango, Scott, 634.

41 Theodore Studite, *Letters*, ed. Georgios Fatouros, *Theodori Studiti Epistulae*, *CFHB* 31/1 (Berlin: 1991), Ep. 38^{63–73}, 110–111.

Alexandria, and John as the envoy of the patriarchs Theodoret of Antioch and Elia of Jerusalem. This version of events is repeated by Photius in his letter to Michael of Bulgaria.⁴² Recently, some historians have published work, based on a re-examination of the official documents contained in the Acts, demonstrating that Thomas and John were not the envoys of the Eastern patriarchates.⁴³ Nevertheless, the *doxa* remains.⁴⁴

Despite the conciliatory tone of the author of the *Chronicle of Theophanes*—"everyone agreed that there should be a council"—plans for a council were met with definite hostility from bishops and the army, especially the *tagmata* stationed in Constantinople, the *Scholai* and *Excoubitoi* above all.⁴⁵ The "Brief Report" at the head of the *Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea*, states that many bishops and laymen refused that a council should be convened, wishing to maintain the "heresy of the accusers of Christians" (*christianokategoroi*)—as the iconoclasts were called—and demonstrated against the patriarch. Unrest grew when the *tagmata* returned from Thrace with the emperors. On 7 August 786 (the date is given in the *Chronicle of Theophanes*) the council met in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, but was soon interrupted.⁴⁶ There was a disorderly crowd of soldiers who, the night before, had proclaimed that they would not accept that the council take place, and who were now planted before the doors, supported from within by some bishops. The emperors decided to stop the council, and the soldiers together with those bishops who supported them proclaimed the council of Hieria as the "seventh council," which implied that it was ecumenical. After which, everyone went home.⁴⁷

Irene overcame the *tagmata*'s hostility by sending them to Malagina in Bithynia where troops ready to leave for the Eastern front were gathering, under the pretence of preparing to parry an Arab attack. She then disarmed them and

42 *Life of Tarasios*, ed. and trans. Efthymiadis, §28, 103^{14–18}; *Photii patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et amphilochia*, ed. Basileios Laourdas and Leendert Westerink, I 1 (Leipzig: 1983), Ep. 1^{374–380}.

43 Patrick Henry, "Initial Eastern Assessments of the Seventh Oecumenical Council," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. 25 (1974), 75–92; Auzépy, *L'hagiographie*, 211–228.

44 Efthymiadis, *Life*, 15, 17–18. Brubaker and Haldon take a non-committal position: *History*, 268, n. 83, 654.

45 On the Palatine units, see John Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians: An administrative, Institutional and Social Survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata c. 580–900* (Poikila Byzantina) 3 (Bonn: 1984), 228–242.

46 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 461, trans. Mango, Scott, 634.

47 *Ibid.*; *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, I, 14. See also Tarasios' allusion in his introductory speech to the council, *ibid.*, 38.

sent them home.⁴⁸ To succeed with her religious policy, she chose to eliminate the elite regiments created by Constantine V, putting the empire's safety at risk. Tarasios asked the papal legates to remain in Constantinople and managed, although it is not clear how, to flip the iconoclast bishops over. Reading the first session of the council makes it clear that he had promised them that they would retain their seats, asking only the most committed to make a *retractatio* before the council. Moreover, to counterbalance the bishops, he had asked the monks to participate in the council, which had the additional advantage of implicating them in the new orthodoxy. The monks' presence at an ecumenical council, gathering only bishops, was an innovation (*kainotomia*) as well as the selection of the patriarch from among the laity.⁴⁹ The new council was convened in Nicaea at the end of September 787. Nicaea was a clever choice, avoiding Constantinople with its population ready to protest, while placing the iconophile Council in the prestigious lineage of the First Ecumenical Council that had been called at Nicaea in 325 by Constantine I. Such a choice implied that this new council represented a renewal of the Church.⁵⁰

Tarasios led these discussions with consummate skill. Well aware that Scripture does not support the use of images—they are forbidden in the Old Testament (Ex.20:4), and the New Testament says nothing about them—Tarasios called upon what he termed “Church tradition” (*paradosis*), that is, forms of devotion, liturgical practices, and hagiography containing reports of miracles due to icons. These were read to the Council as *testimonia* in favour of icons and their miraculous power.⁵¹ Throughout the whole Council, he hammered the notion that since the start of Christianity icons and their worship had been part of Church tradition.⁵² In support of this unaccredited

48 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 462, trans. Mango, Scott, 636; *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO II 3*, I, 14–16.

49 It is nevertheless possible that monks participated in the Council of Hiereia (Auzépy, “Moines,” 6; eadem, *L'histoire*, 45).

50 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO II 3*, II, 596–598. The Carolingians were sensitive to the legitimacy that the city of Nicaea seemed to give the Council of 787 and denied it. *Libri Carolini*, IV, 13, ed. Ann Freeman and Paul Meyvaert, *Opus Caroli regis adversus synodum* (*Libri Carolini*), MGH, Concilia II, Suppl. 1 (Hanover: 1998), 515.

51 A list of the hagiographic texts read to the Council can be found in: Paul van den Ven, “La patristique et l'hagiographie au concile de Nicée de 787,” *Byzantion* 25 (1957), 325–362, here 355–359. A complete list in the index of the *fontes et testimonia*, *Acts of Nicaea II*, *ACO II 3*, III, 1008–1040.

52 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO II 3*, II, 480, 486, 534, 598; “καὶ ἐπέγνωμεν ὅτι ἀρχαία παράδοσις ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν σεπτῶν εἰκόνων ἀναστήλωσις” (We recognize that the setting up of venerable icons is an ancient tradition), said Tarasios at the end of *Actio V* of the Council, *ibid.*, 590; *ACO II 3*, III, 618–622, 630, 644, 646, 750, 770–772, 788, 862, 870. According to the *Scriptor Incertus*, Anthony of Sylaiou replied to Leo V when he asked in 814 if Scripture

affirmation, were offered as proofs of the representation of Christ during His own lifetime the *acheiropoietos* [image made-without-human-hands] icon of Christ presented to King Abgar in Edessa, known as the *Mandyllion*, which appears in sources in the 6th century,⁵³ as well as the long attested statuary group of Paneas.⁵⁴ Thanks to this affirmation, which he knew to be false but which he treated as true, Tarasios threw on the Isaurians the accusation of *kainotomia* which could just as easily have been brought against him.⁵⁵ He claimed that images and their worship had been legitimized by Christ himself, and hence that the Isaurians had broken a centuries-long tradition initiated by Christ. This manoeuvre did not escape the attention of Carolingian theologians who devoted two long chapters of the *Libri Carolini* to refuting the antiquity of images and of their worship,⁵⁶ as well as the authenticity of the *acheiropoietia*.⁵⁷

The iconic religion elaborated during the Council privileged that which belongs to the ecclesiastical institution, "the Church tradition," to the detriment of Scripture and Christological speculation that had characterized Eastern Christian thinking until then. The language of the Council is closer to liturgical poetry than to theology. It is marked by abundant epithets, by interjections (for example: "Oh folly!") and very frequent comparisons.⁵⁸ By choosing the images

spoke of the *proskynesis* of icons: "Nowhere is it written, but they say that it is an ancient tradition." *Scriptor Incertus*, ed. Bekker, 351.

53 Cited to the Council at the reading of Evagrius Ponticus' *Church History* which mentions it: *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, II, 580–582.

54 Twice cited to the Council: *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, II, 476–478 (in the *Letter from Germanos to Thomas of Claudiopolis*); *ACO* II 3, III, 676–678. On these images, see Marie-France Auzépy, "La tradition comme arme de pouvoir: L'exemple de la querelle iconoclaste," in Jean-Marie Sansterre (ed.), *L'autorité du passé dans les sociétés médiévales* (Rome: 2004), 79–92, here 81–87, repr. in eadem, *L'histoire*, 105–115, here 107–111, with a bibliography.

55 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, II, 486⁵–8, III, 632, 676²⁵, 772⁴–8.

56 The purpose of books I and II of the *Libri Carolini* is to prove that the Council of Nicaea misused passages from the Scriptures and the Fathers concerning images and that neither Scripture nor the Church Fathers supported the cult of images. See the conclusion: *Libri Carolini* II, 25, ed. Freeman, Meyvaert, 282–285. Summary of the books I and II in Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009) 180–194. See also Marie-France Auzépy, "Frankfurt et Nicée II," in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794*, ed. Rainer Berndt (Frankfurt: 1997) 279–300, repr. in eadem, *L'Histoire*, 285–302.

57 *Libri Carolini*, IV, 10, ed. Freeman, Meyvaert, 511. On the relation between Byzantine and Carolingian theology on images, see the enlightening book of Noble, *Images*.

58 Carolingian theologians were very upset by this manner of writing and speaking, thinking it reflected confused thinking: *Libri Carolini*, III, 9 and IV 16, ed. Freeman, Meyvaert, 371–374 and 527.

and expressing himself the way he did before the Council, Tarasios showed that, from then on, faith overrode reason.⁵⁹ Feeling was preferred to philosophical reasoning, and visual images were favoured over mental ones.⁶⁰ Charlemagne and his theologians refused to subscribe to such a choice; no more did they accept that this Council might declare itself to be ecumenical whereas not a single Western bishop had been invited. Keeping the Church united had been Tarasios' major argument in favour of the Council, from his speech as a candidate, continuing to his address to the Council. However, the *Libri Carolini* and the Council of Frankfurt (794) rendered the unity of the Church null and void, preparing the ground for a Western empire, at Charlemagne's advantage.

The Council of Nicaea II decided in its *Horos*:⁶¹

The venerable and holy images, made in colours, or mosaic or other fitting materials, in the same way as the figure of the honourable and life-giving cross, are to be dedicated in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, on walls and panels, in houses and in the streets—[namely] the image of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of our immaculate Lady the Holy Theotokos, and of the honourable angels and all the holy and sacred men. For it is to the extent that they are constantly seen through depictions in images that those who behold them [the images] are spurred to remember and yearn for their prototypes. They are to be accorded greeting [*aspasmos* = lit. a kiss] and the veneration of honour [*timetike proskynesis*], not indeed the true worship [*latreia*] corresponding to our faith, which pertains to the divine nature alone, but in the same way as this is accorded to the figure of the honourable and life-giving cross, to the holy gospels, and to other sacred offerings. In their honour an offering of incensation and lights is to be made, in accordance with the pious custom of old. For the honour paid to the image passes over to the prototype, and whoever venerates [*proskynô*]

59 During the Council, in the *refutatio* of the Horos of Hiereia (*Actio* VI), the iconoclasts were reproached with having arrogantly wished to impose their preposterous way of thinking rather than following tradition (*Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, III, 636, 748) and with having been their "own theologians" (*didascales*) (*ibid.* 666, 756). According to the Patriarch Nicephorus, reasoning is the mark of a failure of faith (*apistia*). Nicephorus, *Antirrhethici* III, 2 and 82, PG 100, 377–380 and 525.

60 Not wishing that Christ be depicted implied denying the reality of his visible body, like the *phantasiastes* (*Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, III, 712^{1–8}). Angels could be depicted since they had been seen. *Ibid.*, II, 544; III, 862^{18–19} (Tarasios' *Letter to the Emperors*).

61 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, III, 826.

the image venerates [*proskynô*] as well in it the hypostasis of the one who is represented.⁶²

It remained to apply this decision, which was not self-evident, the more so as the devotional gestures before the image, kiss (*asposmos*) and prostration (*proskynesis*) were in principle obligatory. Tarasios made this clear to the Council and the *Horos* confirmed it.⁶³ The issue of the iconoclast oath was certainly an obstacle to applying the *Horos*. When it was raised at the Council by John “of Jerusalem,” the false Eastern *topoteretes*, Tarasios dealt with the breaking of the oath by evoking the example of Peter’s denial of Christ, which proved that God forgives the evil deeds of sinners who repent.⁶⁴ It is difficult to be sure that this argument carried the day.

As they were written by the defenders of images, Byzantine sources make no mention of resistance at the Council, but in the 794 *Libri Carolini*, Frankish theologians declared that the Council was the cause of the contemporary civil war in the Roman Empire.⁶⁵ This was no doubt an exaggeration, since according to the *Chronicle of Theophanes*, the only cause of the civil war was the dispute between Constantine VI and his mother, but it may have an element of truth. Byzantine sources themselves allow glimpses of the fact that many people were still iconoclasts at heart in the second decade of the 9th century. In 809, Stephen, deacon of the Hagia Sophia, author of *the Life of Stephen the Younger*, a monk killed in the reign of Constantine V, wrote the following, proving that there were still iconoclasts, even among the clergy:

still today, some among us, but who are not one of us—it is clothing, not behaviour, that brings them into our court [no doubt the Patriarchal court]—these men who are about seventy years old, more or less, arrange

62 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, III, 826; trans. R. Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), 2 vols (Liverpool, 2018), 564–65. Price translates *asposmos* as a greeting and *proskynesis* as veneration, but this is problematic as it loses the bodily meaning of the words. Indeed, on p. 565 n. 58 Price makes clear that the text means something concrete. *Asposmos* means a kiss, while a *timetike proskynesis* is a prostration on the knees with the forehead hitting the floor in front of a person of authority who deserves this mark of respect. To understand this gesture, still in use nowadays, one only has to look at the Muslim prostration during the prayer which was initiated during the 7th century in the Byzantine and Sassanian provinces newly conquered by the Arab-Muslim troops.

63 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, II, 372.

64 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, II, 382–384. On this occasion, Bishop Leo of Phocaea said “for that reason, our false oath shall be discounted, having no force.”

65 *Libri Carolini* pref. III, ed. Freeman, Meyvaert, 329.

their beards in this way. May the Lord put them on the straight path, snatch them from the doctrine, the memory and the faith of that tyrant [Constantine v] and give them faith in the truth.⁶⁶

From this we learn, in passing, that religious positions were visible on men's faces: iconoclasts were clean-shaven and iconophiles bearded. The author of the *Chronicle of Theophanes* speaks of a "pseudo-hermit called Nicholas" in 810 in Constantinople who, with others, "blasphemed against venerable icons" and whom the Emperor Nicephorus I left unharmed.⁶⁷ In 812, agitation grew. Some people considered Constantine v saintly on grounds of his piety. A conspiracy formed to overthrow Michael I and place Constantine v's sons on the throne, despite the fact they had all been blinded during the course of four previous failed attempts to put them on the throne.⁶⁸ The plot was discovered by Michael who punished the guilty harshly.⁶⁹ In June 813, while Krum, who was ravaging Thrace, threatened to besiege Constantinople, a group found a ruse to have it believed that Constantine v had miraculously risen from his grave in the Holy Apostles, mounted on horseback to fight the Bulgars.⁷⁰ Their cry was "Rise up and come to the aid of the state [*politeia*])." They were arrested by the prefect who subjected them to public display.⁷¹

Twenty-five years after the Second Council of Nicaea, iconoclasm was not yet dead and the positive memory of Constantine v was still alive. This explains how Leo v was able to return to a moderate iconoclasm without much difficulty, as we shall see. But it also explains the vehemency of the polemical texts written during the "Iconophile Intermission," particularly the *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, *Letters of Gregory II* and *Nouthesia*.⁷² The Council of

66 *Life of Stephen the Younger*, §38, Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, 233.

67 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 488–489, trans. Mango, Scott, 671.

68 In 776 (Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 450, trans. Mango, Scott, 621), in 780 (ibid., 454, 627), 792 (ibid. 468, 643) and in 799 (ibid. 473–474, 651).

69 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 496–497, trans. Mango, Scott, 679–680.

70 These people are not termed soldiers, even if, immediately after this episode, the author of the *Chronicle* reproached the *strateuomenoi*—normally translated as *soldiers*—who beatified Constantine v, as false Christians, indeed Paulicians. But the word *strateuomenos*, if the *Ecloga* is to be believed (*Ecloga*, 16, ed. Burgmann, 220–224), should rather be translated as "someone who holds a *strateia*," which would include a broad group of people, clerics as well as soldiers. The understanding that iconoclasts were to be found only among the soldiers of certain *tagmata* would therefore seem too narrow (Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium*, 367 and n. 2).

71 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 501, trans. Mango, Scott, 684–68.

72 On these texts, see Paul Speck, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen* (Poikila Byzantina) 10 (Bonn: 1990); Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 247–252, 264–272.

Nicaea required on-going validation: before it was held, its existence had to be justified; and after 787, the righteousness and unanimity of its decisions among all Christians had to be affirmed. Since the Council abolished Isaurian decisions, the easiest mode of defence was to disparage the Isaurians. The Council itself opened the way. Called by Constantine v's grandson and his mother, it could not attack the Isaurians directly, but it repeatedly compared iconoclasts to Jews, Christ's assassins, for which the Carolingians reproached them.⁷³ It regularly called iconoclasts "accusers of Christians" (*christianokatégoroi*). Accusers of Christians meant those who accused the pious praying before icons of being idolatrous and therefore not Christians. The Council had put the issue of images in terms of a civil war within Christianity, between "them" and "us."

The polemical texts were less constrained than the Council. These were built up from scraps and pieces copied from one another, often revised to suit the place and the moment, making them hard to date. Their attacks against Leo III and Constantine v were extremely virulent. They frequently turned to the dialogue in use in anti-Jewish polemics ("you say ... but we ...") and tell of iconoclasts' evil deeds in the same way hagiographers tell of the evil actions of those possessed. They draw an apocalyptic portrait of the two emperors, especially of Constantine v: mad, out of control, "dragon," spending his life in drinking and orgies, homosexual, rolling in excrement. Constantine was smeared with demeaning nicknames, such as *Kaballinos*, "the horseshit"⁷⁴ and *Kopronymos*, "the shit-named." They created episodes in a hagiographic style such as the story that at his baptism, Constantine v defecated in the font, which the Patriarch Germanos understood as a bad omen for the Church.⁷⁵ There was also the story of the bargain with Jewish sorcerers who, in exchange for the destruction of images of Christ, of His mother, and of saints, promised a long reign to, according to different versions, Caliph Yazid II, or to Yazid and Leo III, or to Leo alone.⁷⁶ I would also include in this hagiographical style

73 *Libri Carolini* I, 27, 28, ed. Freeman, Meyvaert, 221–224.

74 On that meaning of *kaballinos*, see Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 470, trans. Mango, Scott, 646.

75 *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, §20, PG 95, 337; Theophanes, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 400, trans. Mango, Scott, 551–552.

76 Yazid: *Narratio* of John of Jerusalem (the account of John, the Eastern pseudo-*topoteretes* at the Second Council of Nicaea, which Lamberz considered authentic), *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, II, 590–594. Leo alone: *Adversus Constantinum Caballinum*, §19, PG 95, 336; George the Monk, *Chronicle*, ed. de Boor, 735–738; *Epistula ad Theophilum*, §11: ed. and German trans. Heinz Gauer, *Texte zum byzantinischen Bilderstreit: Der Synodalbrief der drei Patriarchen des Ostens von 836 und seine Verwandlung in sieben Jahrhunderten* (Frankfurt: 1994), 94; ed. and trans. Joseph A. Munitiz et al., *The Letter of the three*

myth-making the removal by an imperial guard (*spatharios*) of the image of Christ on the Chalke Gate (the entry to the palace) ordered by Leo III and the uprising that followed, an account that appears for the first time in the *Life of Stephen the Younger* and then in the *Chronicle of Theophanes*.⁷⁷ The *Life of Stephen the Younger* is indeed a monument of this polemic. Written in the patriarchate during the time of the Patriarch Nicephorus, it caricatures Leo and Constantine, laments the Council of Hieria, and defends the theses of Nicaea with long speeches made by the Patriarch Germanos and Stephen. It depicts Germanos as a staunchly iconophile patriarch, which in reality he does not seem to have been. It affirms a monastic resistance to the council, of which there is no sign. It offers a martyr for the iconophiles, whereas Stephen the monk seems to have been put to death more for political reasons than for religious ones. This saint's life is the diegetic translation of the patriarchate's offensive to make the Church an entity independent from the imperial power, ruled only by the patriarch and officially including the monks.⁷⁸ Taken as a whole, these polemical texts pose a historiographical problem. Their excesses undermine their credibility, but they form the whole documentary field. As there are very few other sources, they have had a considerable role in forming historians' negative vision of the two great Isaurian emperors.

Therefore, the early years of the 9th century were a time of tension between those who were nostalgic for the Isaurian reign and the iconophiles in power. This tension was increased after 811 when the Bulgars entered the empire, massacring Byzantine armies, turning Thrace into rubble, amassing booty and captives, and finally besieging Constantinople, breathing new life into the memory of the great warrior Emperor Constantine V who had held back the Bulgars, as the episode of the Holy Apostles shows. In this context, Leo, *strategos* of the *Anatolikon*, took the throne without violence. History seemed to

Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus and Related Texts (Camberley: 1997), 162–165; Slavonic version, ed. and trans. Dimitri Afinogenov, *Mnogosložnyj Svitok: The Slavonic Letter of the three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus* (Paris: 2014), §40–42, 87–89.

77 See this dossier in Marie-France Auzépy, “La destruction de l’icône du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: Propagande ou réalité?,” *Byzantion* 60 (1990), 445–492, repr. in eadem, *L’histoire des iconoclastes*, 145–178. On the hagiographic avatars of this account, most recently, Sofia Kotzabassi, *Das hagiographische Dossier der heiligen Theodosia von Konstantinopel*, (Byzantinisches Archiv) 21 (Berlin: 2009).

78 Auzépy, *L’hagiographie*. Stephanos Efthymiadis (*Companion*, 1, 100–101) presents the *Life of Stephen the Younger* exclusively as a monastic saint's life, which a careful reading of this text does not support. On the patriarchal offensive during the period, see Afinogenov, “Rise,” 1, and idem, “Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐπίσκοπον ἔχει, The Rise of the Patriarchal Power in Byzantium from Nicaenum II to Epanagoga, Part II: From the Second Outbreak of Iconoclasm to the Death of Methodios,” *Erytheia* 17 (1996), 43–71.

repeat itself as, for the second time, a *strategos* of the *Anatolikon* seized the throne peacefully at a time when the capital was in danger. Once Krum had died in a fit of rage, and the danger of a siege had been parried, Leo began to prepare the terrain for a return to iconoclasm. He did it cleverly, seeming to consider two options, which caused him to be called the chameleon according to the *Scriptor Incertus*.⁷⁹ This author maintains that Leo's desire to return to iconoclasm was motivated by the fact that the people saw a relationship between religious policy and military outcomes, and was concerned by the coincidence between the devotion to images imposed by Nicaea II and the defeat of Byzantine armies.⁸⁰ It was a strong argument, further reinforced by the fact that Leo sought to follow the Isaurian example in the hope of assuring himself a reign as long as theirs.

The return to iconoclasm in 814–15 is well documented, thanks to the *Scriptor Incertus*. Alexander, in his biography of the Patriarch Nicephorus, established a chronology based on sources that has become the vulgate of the history of this return. Faced with the offensive of Leo V, the patriarch assembled the bishops and abbots for a *pannychis* (night of prayer) at the Patriarchate on 24 December 814. The day following, they were called to the palace and faced down the emperor. This confrontation on Christmas Day, 814, marked the start of the persecution.⁸¹ However, a careful reading of sources does not support this chronology.

Let us examine the facts as the *Scriptor Incertus* records them, each carefully dated:⁸²

- In the spring of 814, a team assembled on the orders of Leo V sought *testimonia* hostile to images. Its main members were John the Grammarian, and starting in July, Anthony, bishop of Syliaion, working at the palace.⁸³
- In December 814, “before the holidays,”⁸⁴
 - Leo V broached the issue of icons with the Patriarch Nicephorus;

79 *Scriptor Incertus*, ed. Bekker, 356–358.

80 *Ibid.*, 351.

81 Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford: 1958) 128–133. For the vulgate, see inter alia: Treadgold, *Revival*, 210–211; Afinogenov, *Rise*, II, 49–50; Gilbert Dagron, *Le christianisme byzantin du VIIe au milieu du XIe siècle*, in *Histoire du Christianisme*, ed. Gilbert Dagron, Pierre Riché and André Vauchez, IV (Paris: 1993), 142; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 371.

82 *Scriptor Incertus*, ed. Bekker, 349–361.

83 July: *ibid.*, 352⁶.

84 December: *ibid.*, 352; before the holidays: 355²³.

- then a discussion ensued in the presence of the emperor between the bishops and abbots, guarantors of Nicaean orthodoxy, and the iconoclast team of the palace;
- after this discussion which ended when the bishops were sent away by a furious emperor, the patriarch arranged a *pannychis* in the Hagia Sophia;
- soldiers threw stones at the image of Christ that the Empress Irene had placed on the Chalke;
- The patriarch called together “all the bishops and monks at the patriarchate” and they swore to be of one voice in defence of the true faith.
- The holidays having arrived, Leo v seemed convinced by the patriarch.⁸⁵
- On Christmas day, 814, Leo v prostrated himself before the image of the nativity on the altar cloth of the Hagia Sophia, reassuring the patriarch and the bishops.⁸⁶
- On Epiphany (6 January 815), he did not repeat this action, so that all understood that he had in fact decided in favour of iconoclasm.⁸⁷
- Leo v convinced some of the bishops to send an ultimatum to Nicephorus who, refusing to comply, fell ill, but did not die, contrary to the hopes of Leo v.
- At the start of Lent, Nicephorus was forcibly removed from the Patriarchate and sent to Chrysopolis.⁸⁸
- Leo v called a *silention* (an assembly of dignitaries) to announce Nicephorus’ resignation, naming Theodotus Melissenos as the new patriarch, a layman like Tarasios and Nicephorus, who held the title of *Spatharokandidatos* and whose father had been the brother-in-law of Constantine v.
- At Easter 815, Theodotus was installed.⁸⁹ After Easter, Leo v convened a council which restored the decisions of Hiereia and declared anathema the “orthodox fathers,” i.e., the bishops of Nicaea II.⁹⁰ Those bishops who refused to obey were exiled and the persecution began.

Two major hagiographic texts also report these events: the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, and the *Life of Nicephorus*. Neither provides any dates. They report

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., 356¹⁹.

87 Ibid., 357².

88 Ibid., 358³.

89 Ibid., 360⁵.

90 Ibid., 360^{15–16}.

that the Patriarch Nicephorus assembled all the bishops and abbots for a *pannychis* at Hagia Sophia and that the emperor, furious, called them to the palace where Nicephorus arrived at dawn, closely followed by the crowd of bishops and monks.⁹¹ The account of their confrontation with the emperor follows. The *Life of Nicetas* reports the words of the best-known of the bishops: Emilian of Cyzicus, Michael of Synada, Theophylact of Nicomedia, Euthymios of Sardis, and of the most famous *higoumen*: Theodore Studite. Each in their turn refuted the arguments of Leo V. The *Life of Nicephorus* reduces this scene to a long dialogue between the patriarch and the emperor.⁹²

Alexander merged the facts given by the chronicler with those of the hagiographers and dated them. He gives 24 December for the meeting at the Patriarchate which following the *Scriptor Incertus* he placed after the events at the Chalke Gate.⁹³ He then places the confrontation at the palace described by the hagiographers on 25 December.⁹⁴

The *Scriptor Incertus* gives a chronological sequence of four events before Christmas 814: first, a discussion at the palace between the iconoclast team and the patriarch accompanied by bishops and monks, the emperor being present; second, a *pannychis* at the Hagia Sophia; third, the destruction of the Chalke icon; fourth, a meeting at the patriarchate where bishops and monks promise the patriarch never to leave the faith of Nicaea II. As for the two hagiographical texts, they describe, but do not date, a quick suite of two events: a *pannychis* at the Hagia Sophia followed by a tumultuous interview between the emperor and the patriarch the day after. Alexander followed the hagiographical version which he filled out with details provided by the *Scriptor Incertus* and he dated the events. Like the two *Lives*, he chooses a sequence of two events: a *pannychis* followed the day after by a confrontation at the palace. But he blends the *pannychis* with the meeting at the Patriarchate which the *Scriptor Incertus* sets in third position. He dates

91 *Life of Nicetas*, §32, XXIX; *Life of Nicephorus*, ed. de Boor, 165–167, trans. Fisher, 78–80.

92 *Life of Nicetas*, §33–35, XXIX–XXX; *Life of Nicephorus*, ed. de Boor, 167–193, trans. Fisher, 81–104.

93 Alexander, *Nicephorus*, 129. Alexander preserves the order given by the *Scriptor Incertus* (*pannychis*/Chalke/meeting at the Patriarchate), but Treadgold (*Revival*, 210–211), followed by Afinogenov (“Rise,” II, 49, n. 29) believe, without specifying on what grounds, that the *pannychis* and the meeting at the patriarchate were one and the same event.

94 Alexander, *Nicephorus*, 129–132. The *Life of Theophylact of Nicomedia* (BHG 2451) ed. Albert Vogt, “Saint Théophylacte de Nicomédie,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 50 (1932), 67–82, here 78–79 (cited by Alexander, 129, n. 3) gives the names of the bishops who participated in the confrontation without supplying any dates.

this *pannychis* and meeting from 24 December and the confrontation from Christmas day.

There is nothing to support placing the meeting where Nicephorus was granted the unanimous accord of the clergy on 24 December, even if this is a possible date since it must have taken place at the end of December, before the 25th, the start of the holidays. The holidays in question are those between Christmas and Epiphany, when the emperor held daily banquets for important members of the civil, military, and religious establishment in the Tribunal of the Nineteen Couches.⁹⁵ However, 25 December as the date for the confrontation described in the two *Lives* is not acceptable. Once the holidays started, as we have seen, Nicephorus and the bishops were reassured by Leo v's Christmas prostration, and realized that they had been duped only at Epiphany when the emperor did not repeat it. It is clear, although the *Scriptor Incertus* does not say it, that Leo v sought tranquillity during the holidays, when he would encounter the elite of the empire. A turbulent gathering on Christmas morning is incompatible with Leo v's behaviour at the Hagia Sophia later that same day as reported by the *Scriptor*. Moreover, the length of the ceremony in which the patriarch and the emperor both participated on Christmas morning makes a meeting at the palace at just that time impossible.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the chronological frame built up by Alexander (meeting at the patriarchate on 24 December/confrontation at the palace on 25 December) was accepted by other historians and became the story of the return to iconoclasm under Leo v. This is a good example of the influence of hagiographical sources even on the best historians, and hence on the history of this period.⁹⁷

What can be said of this turn-around is that during the winter 814–15, Leo v used a variety of means hoping to rally the patriarch, bishops, and abbots to his view; he constructed a dossier of *testimonia*, used threats and seduction, with a violent confrontation before Christmas 814. If he had no success with the patriarch and a handful of bishops and abbots, on the other hand he did convince the majority of them from Epiphany to Easter 815. They abandoned the patriarch Nicephorus, exiled in mid-February, and the defence of the "true

95 *Traité de Philothée* (899) in Nicolas Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris: 1972), 164–188. The dinner on the tenth day after Christmas in the Tribunal of the Nineteen Couches, to which "twelve paupers" were invited, goes back at least as far as the reign of Constantine v: *ibid.*, 182–183; Simon Bendall and John Nesbitt, "A 'Poor' Token from the Reign of Constantine V," *Byzantion* 60 (1990), 432–435.

96 *De Cerimoniis*, I 32(23), ed. Albert Vogt, *Le Livre des Cérémonies*, I (Paris: 1967), 119–126, trans. Moffatt and Tall, 128–136.

97 One exception: Tatiana Matantseva, "La conférence sur la vénération des images en décembre 814," *REB* 56 (1998), 249–260, here 253.

faith." He found enough bishops to participate after Easter in the Council of the new patriarch, Theodotus, and to support a return to the decisions of Hiereia, softened by setting aside the accusation of idolatry.⁹⁸ It is possible that Theosteriktos, the author of the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, created the confrontation at the palace in order to transform the defeat of his faction into victory; it seems to be a hagiographic adaptation of the first meeting mentioned by the *Scriptor Incertus*. This confrontation allows the hagiographer to put the defence of the Church as a power independent from the emperor into the mouths of bishops and monks. He has Theodore Studite say: "O emperor, do not touch the situation of the Church [...] You were entrusted with the political situation and with the army. Take care of them and leave the Church to the pastors and theologians."⁹⁹ Thus, the hagiographer followed the road opened by the Second Council of Nicaea and later by the *Life of Stephen the Younger*: the Council had dared to define the imperial power as limited to politics and army, the Church being excluded *de facto*.¹⁰⁰

Unlike Constantine v after Hiereia, Leo v was faced with a determined opposition. Although they were not asked to sign a declaration of faith but only to be in communion with the patriarch, a group of bishops and abbots refused any sort of compromise, sometimes after a brief hesitation.¹⁰¹ They were stripped of their functions and exiled. The vast hagiographic literature which describes them, generated as early as the 820s and especially after 843, made them well known. Their struggle drew its legitimacy from the existence of the Second Council of Nicaea, to which they were particularly attached, some like Euthymios of Sardis because they had had an important role in it.¹⁰² Others clung to Nicaea because they had been raised by Tarasios in its ideology, like Michael of Synada and Theophylact of Nicomedia, whom Tarasios took with him when he left imperial office, making them monks and later

98 On the decisions of the council of 815, see Paul J. Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (*Horos*)," *DOP* 7 (1953), 35–66; repr. in idem, *Religious and Political History and Thought in the Byzantine Empire* (London: 1978), viii; Nicephorus, *Refutatio*, ed. Featherstone.

99 *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, §35, xxx.

100 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* 11 3, 111, 780^{24–28}.

101 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 380, n. 53.

102 Euthymios of Sardis (*PmbZ* 1838), associate of Tarasios at Nicaea II (*Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* 11 3, 11, 482); *Life of Euthymios of Sardis* by Methodius (BHG 2145), ed. and French trans. Jean Gouillard, "La Vie d'Euthyme de Sardes (d. 831) une œuvre du patriarche Méthode," *TM* 10 (1987), 20–89, here §3, 22–23.

bishops.¹⁰³ As for the abbots like Macarius of Pelekete, Theophanes or Nicetas of Medikion, they were mostly from Bithynian monasteries, Bithynia being the province where a large number of young elites from the capital had created monasteries since the reign of Irene, with Mount Olympus coming to be considered a holy mountain during this period.¹⁰⁴ Theodore Studite has a special place among them since, coming from Bithynia, he rose to the prestigious position of abbot of the powerful Stoudios monastery in the capital. He stood out during the Iconophile Intermission by virtue of his intransigence with respect to imperial power accused of failing to apply canon law on the occasion of Constantine VI's second marriage and he violently opposed the patriarch who in accordance with the principle of "economy" (*oikonomia*) applied the imperial will. Theodore also combined several monasteries under his authority, laying the foundations of a network that in the West would be called an order.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, by 815, in sharp distinction to the situation in 754, there was an elite among the clergy and the monks which had helped to form the Nicaean ideology or had been educated in it. This explains the existence and tenacity of the resistance to the second wave of iconoclasm.

Michael II, who took power after assassinating Leo V, did not question religious policies, and, although he allowed exiles to return, he did not restore them to their previous positions. In a letter he sent to Louis the Pious in 824, he justified maintaining an iconoclast position by describing devotional practices associated with icons, which sufficed, he thought, to continue banning their use. Lights were lit and incense burnt constantly before them. Some employed icons as godfathers during baptism or when taking the monastic habit. Some clergymen took scrapings from icons and mixed them with the wine and the bread of the Eucharist or served the bread on an icon. To avoid such excesses, since 815 icons had to be placed at a certain height, to avoid their being worshiped.¹⁰⁶

103 Michael: *PmbZ* 5042; Theophylact: *PmbZ* 8295. Both: *Life of Theophylact of Nicomedia* (BHG 2451) §2, 5, ed. Vogt, 72–73; (BHG 2452) §2, ed. François Halkin in *Hagiologie byzantine*, (Subsidia Hagiographica) 71 (Brussels: 1986) 170–184, here 172–73.

104 Auzépy, "Monastères," 431–439.

105 *PmbZ* 7574; on the confederation of monasteries, see Daniel Stiernon, "Notice sur S. Jean Higoumène de Kathara," *REB* 28 (1970), 111–127, here 121–122; Olivier Delouis, "Saint Jean-Baptiste de Stoudios à Constantinople" (PhD thesis, University Paris 1, Panthéon Sorbonne: 2005), 201–230.

106 Jean D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence-Venice: 1759); repr. (Graz: 1960–1962) 14, 417–422, here 420; trans. Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1972), 157–158.

The sources—10th-century chronicles and more or less contemporary saints' lives—paint a gloomy picture of Theophilos' religious policy. They are less violent than the anti-Isaurian ones but they nevertheless present the iconoclast emperor as a cruel persecutor of monks, who on the whole were attached to the icons and ready to die for them. This picture has to be reconsidered. The reign of Theophilos, with the exception of the capture of Amorion by the Arabs, seems relatively brilliant.¹⁰⁷ Besides the attention he brought to justice in continuity with the Isaurian emperors, Theophilos is known to have built the richly decorated palace of Bryas and new buildings in the Grand Palace. Having been raised by John the Grammarian, he was an educated man and possibly encouraged the cultural life: Paul Lemerle considers his reign, with the figures of John and of his cousin—or nephew—Leo the Mathematician, as the beginnings of the "Byzantine first humanism."¹⁰⁸ Theophilos celebrated his victories against the Arabs by two gorgeous triumphs which are only recorded in the *De Cerimoniis*.¹⁰⁹ They were surely a climax of his reign since the very iconophile text known as *The Absolution of Theophilos* found it convenient to place Theophilos' last judgment at the Chalke with a terrible judge sitting on a throne at the very place where Theophilos sat down at the end of his triumphal procession according to *De Cerimoniis*.¹¹⁰

The charges against him were of course the destruction of images and the persecution of monks. His choice of an aniconic religious art is certain since it followed the decisions of Hiereia confirmed in 815; the persecution of religious opponents did exist, but not in the caricatured forms given by the bulk of sources. For example, according to the 10th-century chronicles, Theophilos forbade the monks to live in Constantinople; by correlation with the *Life of Niketas the Patrician* which documents an intensification of Theophilos' iconoclast policy during the fourth year of his reign, some historians considered this ban as an "edict" dated from 833.¹¹¹ If the intensification is likely, the ban is less so: the officially iconoclast

107 On the reign of Theophilos, see Signes Codoñer, *The Emperor Theophilos*, as in n. 2.

108 Paul Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (Paris: 1971), 135–176.

109 *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. and trans. John Haldon, *CFHB* 28 (Vienna: 1990), 807–884, 146–151. On these triumphs, Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: 1986), 146–49.

110 The scene happens during a dream of Theodora, Theophilos' widow: "Narrationes de Theophilo imperatore constantinopolitano et Theodora imperatrice sub restitutione imaginum," ed. W. Regel, *Analecta Byzantino-Russica* (Saint Petersburg: 1891), 19–39, here 35.

111 *Theophanes Continuatus: Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur Libri I–IV*, eds and trans. Jeffrey M. Featherstone and Juan Signes Codoñer, *CFHB* 53 (Berlin: 2015) III 10, 144–145; John Skylitzes, *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. Hans Thurn,

monasteries of the capital lived on quietly, with the exception of the monks of the monastery *tôn Abramitôn* who, according to the chronicles, attacked imperial iconoclasm in front of the ‘tyrant’ and were consequently exiled and lashed to death.¹¹² The most famous opponent to imperial iconoclasm is Euthymios of Sardis who died in 831 from the aftermath of the lashes ordered by Theophilos, according to his *Life* written by the future patriarch Methodius who shared the same cell, actually a tiny cave.¹¹³ Euthymios was indeed a convinced iconophile, but this is not the reason why he was lashed to death; he was lashed because he had published political prophecies about the date of the emperor’s death, as had Methodius, who was put in jail for the same reason.¹¹⁴ Political prophecies were a very efficient weapon in the opponents’ hands because they scared the emperors by giving rise to the rumour of their death. They were apparently very fashionable in the first half of the 9th century. According to the *Scriptor Incertus*, John the Grammarian and the team gathering around him to find iconoclast texts had given as a pretext to their meeting the study of a prediction about the length of Leo’s reign; *Skylitzes* talks at length about the prophecies given to Theophilos by an Arab captive lady, as does *Theophanes Continuatus*, who describes also Leo v’s fear when he discovered a book with predictions about future emperors.¹¹⁵ The accusations against Euthymios and Methodius were therefore very serious, almost as serious as those of usurpation, but they were political and not religious. As for the Graptoi brothers, Theophanes and Theodore, Palestinian monk refugees to Constantinople under Michael I, they were called in July 836 to the palace from their exile and, on Theophilos’ orders, had their faces tattooed with 12 bad iambic verses, a cruel punishment indeed for the good poets they were. Some of

CFHB 5 (Berlin and New York: 1973), 59; trans. John Wortley, *John Skylitzes, a Synopsis of Histories* (Cambridge: 2010), 61; French trans. and comm. Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Jean Skylitzès, Empereurs de Constantinople* (Paris: 2003), 55. *Life of Nicetas the Patrician* (BHG 1342b) §4, ed. and French trans. Denise Papachryssanthou, “Un confesseur du second iconoclisme: La vie du patrice Nicéas (+836),” *TM* 3 (1968), 309–351, here 328–9 (Theophilos’ edict forbidding to shelter any “orthodox”). On the “edict”: Treadgold, *Revival*, 280; Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 394.

112 *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. and trans. Featherstone and Signes Codoñer, III 11, 144–147; *Skylitzes*, ed. Thurn, 59–60, trans. Wortley, 61.

113 Gouillard, “La Vie d’Euthyme,” 2–15.

114 *Life of Euthymios* §13: Gouillard, “La Vie d’Euthyme,” 40–43. Joseph of Thessaloniki, Theodore Stoudite’s brother, was prosecuted for the same charge.

115 *Scriptor Incertus*, ed. Bekker, 352; *Skylitzes*, ed. Thurn, 72–73, trans. Wortley, 73–74; *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. and trans. Featherstone and Signes Codoñer, III 27, 174–175 (the lady), I 22, 56–57 (Leo). For an example of those prophecies: *Apocalypse of Ps. Leo of Constantinople*, ed. and Italian trans. Riccardo Maisano, *L’Apocalisse apocriфа di Leone di Costantinopoli* (Nobilità dello Spirito, Nuova serie) III (Naples: 1975).

these verses alluded to evil deeds that they had done in Jerusalem, from where they had been expelled as “apostates,” and that they had continued doing in Constantinople.¹¹⁶ So, in their case also, the charge is not militant iconophilia but something else, which is difficult to define but deserved an imperial response. According to his *Life*, Michael the Synkellos, former *synkellos* of the patriarch of Jerusalem, remained in jail during Theophilos’ reign, first at the *Phiale* inside the Palace, then after 836 at the *Praetorium*.¹¹⁷ Such a treatment exceeds the only charge of iconophilia if we remember that meanwhile iconophile monks and bishops lived quietly enough in Bithynia. The “persecution” by Theophilos looks more like lawsuits than religious persecutions.

Theophilos died in 842, and it was during the minority of his son Michael III, barely two years old, under the regency of his mother Theodora that the final change in official policy on icons occurred. This process is even less well understood than the previous one. The restoration of images, which turned out to be permanent, was called the Triumph of Orthodoxy and established “Orthodox” religion as we still know it today. The sources documenting this major event were, as we have said, created long after the fact. They present the period 842–43 under the double light of militant orthodoxy and Macedonian legitimation. The lack of a source like the *Scriptor Incertus* is greatly to be regretted. As a result, it is possible to know neither why it was decided to abandon iconoclasm nor really who decided it, nor what kinds of divisions existed among the iconophiles, nor if there was a real iconoclast opposition to the decisions of 843. The chronology of these events seems beyond our reach.¹¹⁸ All we can be certain of is the resignation of the Patriarch John the Grammarian (837–843), and his replacement by Methodius. On the other hand, the careful study of sources by Jean Gouillard shows that the synod which again validated the Second Council of Nicaea, and even the procession with icons from the Blachernae to the Hagia Sophia on the first Sunday of Lent 843, may be later

116 Arrival under Michael I: *Life of Theodore Graptos* (BHG 1746) PG 116: 653–684, here §27, 676. Confrontation with Theophilos: *The Life of Michael the Synkellos* (BHG 1296), trans. Mary B. Cunningham (Belfast: 1991), §18–24, 80–99; the iambic verses: §20, 86–87 and n. 145; *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. and trans. Featherstone and Signes Codoñer, III 14, with a beautiful translation of the iambic verses, 153.

117 *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, trans. Cunningham, §17, 78–79 (Phiale), §24, 98–99 (Praetorium). On Michael and the brothers Graptoi, see Claudia Sode, *Jerusalem-Konstantinopel-Rom*, (Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium) 4 (Stuttgart: 2001).

118 Brubaker and Haldon, *History*, 447–452.

reconstructions.¹¹⁹ Another fact that used to be considered certain but which is only likely is the belief that Theodora's acceptance would have been granted only on condition that the memory of her husband, Theophilos, should be spared.¹²⁰ The ruthlessness of the anti-iconoclast argument allows us to grasp that she might not have wished that the father of her son go down in history known as Theophilos the "Shit-named."¹²¹ What is certain in any case is that after 844, the Feast of Orthodoxy was celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. The religious service included the reading of the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, the document that celebrates the triumph over the heresy of the iconoclasts and which, bit by bit, with additions referring to other heresies, has become the symbol of the Orthodox faith.¹²²

At the end of this study of a period about which so little is really known, it is nonetheless possible to arrive at a few conclusions. In the course of the emperors' vacillations on religious matters, it seems that it was the Church, that is the patriarchate of Constantinople, which was the biggest winner. By placing icons and their worship at the centre of dogma, the Church diverted the risk, clearly a realistic one at the end of the 7th century and the beginning of the 8th, of having a personal piety growing, based on a direct relationship with God and his saints by means of icons, without the intervention of clergy. It domesticated the icon, so to speak. But this domestication froze the icon in the continual repetition of its models—Christ, the Virgin, saints—whose revered portrait, to avoid all misunderstanding, is unchanging "unto the ages of ages" and authenticated by an inscription. At the same time, the orthodox Church drew back into its own domain, its "unwritten tradition," as can be seen at the Second Council of Nicaea and heard proclaimed at the Feast of Orthodoxy.¹²³ During the Feast, the Church announces to the people the victory over imperial iconoclasm and does it with its own means of communication, that is, a procession and the celebration of a religious service.¹²⁴ The

119 Jean Gouillard, "Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie: édition et commentaire," *TM* 2 (1967), 1–316; synod: 161–168; procession: 129–138.

120 See Patricia Karlin-Hayter, "Restoration of Orthodoxy, the Pardon of Theophilos and the Acta Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii," in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilisation: In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. Elizabeth M. Jeffreys (Cambridge: 2006), 361–73.

121 For a more canonical reading, see Afinogenov, "Rise," II, 59–61.

122 Gouillard, "Synodikon," Greek text and French trans. 44–107. On the authenticity of the *Synodikon*: *ibid.*, 153–158.

123 *Acts of Nicaea II*, ed. Lamberz, *ACO* II 3, III, 620⁷, 822¹² et 824²⁴ (*Horos*). *Synodikon*, ed. Gouillard, 50, 51^{82–86}.

124 *Traité de Philothée* (899) in Oikonomidès, *Listes*, 194–195.

repetitive nature of the never ending annual liturgical cycle fits perfectly with the permanence of the icon, thus situating Orthodoxy out of human linear and finite time and placing it rather in the hands of Providence. These characteristics, which emerge from the battle against imperial iconoclasm engaged between 780 and 843, survive to the present. Another trait that marks the Church of Constantinople, the predominance of the monks, was also acquired then. To impose iconophilism in 787, and to defend it afterward, the Patriarchs Tarasios and Nicephorus needed all the resources of the Church, most especially to have the monks rally to their struggle. In 787, to sway the bishops, Tarasios wanted the monks to be present at the council. Under Nicephorus, by favouring the writing of the *Life of Stephen the Younger*, the patriarchate offered to the monastic *tagma* (battalion) an account of the monks' exemplary resistance to the Council of Hiereia. And, in 815, faced with the bishops' willingness to change sides, some monks' resistance was real. In this way, monks acquired a halo as ramparts of Orthodoxy, and were totally integrated into the Church of which they became an essential element. The proof of this came in 843 with the choice of Methodius as patriarch: he was a monk, rather than a layman rocketed to the patriarchate in three days as had almost always been the case from the reign of Irene; neither was he a bishop or a clergyman of the Patriarchate as had been the rule before 784.

Other consequences concerning the relations between the Church and political powers were less long-lived, although they continued in the empire until 1453, and in Russia well beyond that. Iconophilism's victory allowed the patriarchate to declare the Church's autonomy from imperial power accused of having encroached on its territory when it imposed a religious norm, as is shown, for example, by the famous expression attributed to Leo III by iconophile propaganda: "I am emperor and priest."¹²⁵ The movement constituting the Church as an independent entity started in Rome in the 7th century with the Monothelite crisis. The bishop of Rome then affirmed his autonomy in the 8th century by approaching the Carolingians and creating his own temporal domain. In the 9th century, the patriarch of Constantinople, spurred on by a wave of opposition to imperial iconoclasm expressed in incredibly violent texts, barred the emperor from ruling on questions of dogma and presented himself as the head of the Church. The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, read every year on the first Sunday of Lent, declares this new state of affairs. Within its own

125 *Letter of Gregory II to Leo III*, II, ed. and French trans. Jean Gouillard, "Aux origines de l'iconoclasme: Le témoignage de Grégoire II?," *TM* 3 (Paris: 1968), 243–307, here 299; repr. in idem, *La vie religieuse à Byzance* (IV) (London: 1981); Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre: Étude sur le césaropapisme byzantin* (Paris: 1996), 169–200, trans. *Emperor and Priest* (Cambridge: 2003), 158–191.

walls and within its own ceremonial, the Church declared itself the guarantor of the purity of dogma by means of this document condemning all heretics and acclaiming the orthodox. The new equilibrium between the Church and imperial power, as the patriarchate wished and imagined it, is expressed in the *Eisagoge*, most likely drawn up by Patriarch Photius (877–886), in which the patriarch is characterized as “the image of Christ” while the emperor is only “the legitimate authority.”¹²⁶ However, the political reality remains: the emperor still names the patriarch.

¹²⁶ *Eisagoge* = *Epanagoge*, ed. Andreas Schminck, *Studien zu mittelbyzantinischen Rechtbüchern*, (Forschungen zur Byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte) 13 (Frankfurt: 1986), 1–15; Ioannes and Panagiotes Zepos, *Jus graeco-romanum*, II (Athens: 1931), 240–242; Dagron, *Empereur*, 236–242, *Emperor*, 229–235.

PART 4

The Theology of Byzantine Iconoclasm



The Theological Argument about Images in the 8th Century

Andrew Louth

Discussion of the theological debates over images in the 8th century is hampered by the one-sided way in which the evidence has been preserved. So far as literary evidence is concerned, all we have comes from the defenders of the icons, who were eventually successful. However, as a central feature of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II in 787) was a detailed refutation of the iconoclast arguments rehearsed at the iconoclast Council of Hieria, called by Constantine V in 754, the recorded proceedings of the sixth session of Nicaea II constitute a quarry from which some insight into the arguments of the iconoclasts in the middle of the 8th century can be excavated.¹ So far as visual evidence is concerned, very little survives in the East from before the iconoclast controversy: evidence either of the success of the smashing of the icons (the meaning of iconoclasm, though the defenders of icons more commonly called their opponents *eikonomachoi* [“fighters against the icons”]) or, possibly, of the small extent of the making and veneration of icons in the period before the “iconoclast” controversy—but this is beyond the scope of this chapter.²

As far as argument is concerned, it cannot be ignored that some sort of theology of icons, religious images, is presented in inchoate form in one of the canons of the so-called Council *in Trullo* of 691–92.³ This synod was conceived

- 1 For the *Acta* of Nicaea II, I have used Richard Price's translation, with introduction and notes, published in *Translated Texts for Historians*, 68: *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), 2 vols (Liverpool: 2018). References are to the critical edition by Erich Lamberg: *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, ser. 2, vol. 3, with pagination added from Price's translation.
- 2 For a survey and discussion of the sources, material first, then literary, see Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclasm Era (ca 680–850). The Sources: An Annotated Survey* (Aldershot: 2001); and idem, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c.680–850: A History* (Cambridge: 2011). See also Hans Georg Thümmel, *Die Frühgeschichte der ostkirchlichen Bilderlehre: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Zeit vor dem Bilderstreit* (Berlin: 1992).
- 3 For the Council *in Trullo*, see George Nedungatt and Michael Featherstone (eds.), *The Council in Trullo Revisited* (Kanonika) 6 (Rome: 1995), which reprints (on pages 41–186) the text of the canons, edited by Périclès-Pierre Joannou in *Discipline générale antique (II^e–IX^e s.)*, Fonti, Fascicolo IX, t. 1, 1: *Les canons des conciles oecuméniques* (Rome: 1962), 98–241 (with an English, rather than Joannou's French translation).

as a continuation of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople III (680–1), and later thought supplementary to the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils, neither of which issued any disciplinary canons, hence it is often called the Fifth-Sixth (Quinisext or Πενθέκτη) Council. This synod issued 102 canons, understood in some sense as a recapitulation of the canonical tradition of the Eastern Church. Canon 82 is concerned with icons depicting John the Forerunner (the Baptist) pointing to Christ, depicted as a lamb; it rejects this practice, which belongs to the use of “ancient figures (τύπους) and shadows” as “symbols of the truth,” insisting that after the fulfilment of the law by Christ, we should prefer “grace and truth” (cf. John 1:17), and depict Christ in the human form that he assumed in the Incarnation.⁴ Given this, it is hardly surprising that the Incarnation was central to theological argumentation about icons of Christ in the 8th century.

There is a further feature about the theological argument about icons in the 8th century. Argument is virtually always with another party, responding to their arguments; however, in this case, it is only by conjecture that we can construct the arguments to which our texts respond. For the 8th century, our evidence consists of three bodies of texts: the letters of Germanos of Constantinople, preserved in the *Acta* of Nicaea II,⁵ the treatises (really the *three* versions of the same treatise) against the iconoclasts by John of Damascus,⁶ and what can be gleaned of the iconoclast argument of Constantine v’s *Peuseis*, cited for refutation in the *Antirrhetici* of Nikephoros, early 9th-century patriarch of Constantinople, which are echoed, at some remove, in the *Horos* of the Council of Hieria, itself preserved in its refutation in the sixth session of Nicaea II.⁷ Apart from the treatise(s) of John Damascene, these sources for theological argument are themselves presented in the context of arguments belonging to a different historical context: Germanos’ letters cited at Nicaea II as (not entirely convincing) evidence of the traditional support of the see of Constantinople for the veneration of icons, while the citations from the *Peuseis* are used to support the argument of the *Horos*, itself cited for the purpose of refutation at Nicaea II. It is only in general terms that one can discern the position being

4 For Canon 82, see Nedungatt and Featherstone, *Council in Trullo Revisited*, 162–4.

5 *ACO*, ser. 2, vol. 3, 442–78; Price, I, 334–55.

6 *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres*, ed. P. Bonifatius Kotter, O.S.B., in *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, III (Berlin: 1975); English translation: St John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, translation and introduction by Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: 2003).

7 *Textus Byzantinos ad Iconomachiam Pertinentes in usum academicum edidit Herman Hennephof* (Leiden: 1969), 52–57, for fragments from the *Peuseis*; *Horos*: idem, 61–78; English translation: Price, II, 668–84.

refuted by the arguments of the texts that survive. The one-sidedness of our 8th-century sources is in striking contrast to the 9th-century defences of icons by Nikephoros and Theodore the Studite, both of whom engage with the Council of Hiereia and the *Peuseis* of Constantine V.

1 The Letters of Germanos of Constantinople

At the Council of Hiereia, three defenders of icons were anathematized: Germanos of Constantinople, George of Cyprus, and John of Damascus. Of George of Cyprus, we know nothing;⁸ Germanos and John are our 8th-century sources for the defence of icons. The three letters of Germanos—to John, bishop of Synada, to Constantine, bishop of Nakoleia, and to Thomas, bishop of Klaudiupolis—are introduced in the *Acta* by a letter from Pope Gregory II to Germanos. In the anathema of the three iconodules, Germanos is described as τῷ διγνώμῳ καὶ ξυλολάτρῃ (“double-minded and wood-worshipper”); the first epithet would seem to refer to his hesitant response to Leo III’s introduction of iconoclasm, most likely to his behaviour in the years 726 to 730, the year in which he resigned, perhaps not so much in protest against Leo’s iconoclast policy, but so as not to have to confront the emperor, though his falling in with the introduction of Monotheletism by the Emperor Philippikos Bardanes in 712 could also have been referred to. These letters, especially prefaced by the (most likely interpolated) letter from the pope, are intended to enlist Germanos in the rewriting of the history of the first period of iconoclasm by the patriarchal court so as to present Constantinople as firmly iconodule.⁹ In fact, however, Germanos’ defence of icons is really very moderate. He has no time for iconoclasm, clearly approving of the value of icons. The thrust of his argument seems to be primarily against the suggestion that the use of icons amounts to idolatry, which suggests that it was the charge of idolatry that was the primary justification of iconoclasm under Leo III. Some memory of this may be preserved in one of the anathemas uttered by the fathers of Nicaea II, repeated in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, pronounced on “those who say that another, apart from Christ our God, delivered us from the error of idols.”¹⁰ But Germanos does

8 Unless he is the author of the *Nouthesia gerontos*, which is possible but problematic: see the discussion in Brubaker and Haldon, *Sources*, 251–52.

9 On this use of hagiography to promote an idealized vision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, see Marie-France Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclisme byzantin* (Aldershot: 1999), which mainly concerns the *Life of St Stephen the Younger*, but has wider implications.

10 ACO, 854; Price, II. 577; cf. *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, ed. J. Gouillard, *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967), lines 759–60 (page 93).

not, in fact, argue for the veneration of icons, but rather for their legitimate place in devotion to God through the Incarnate Son and his Mother, a devotion also fostered by the cult of saints. The icons themselves are secondary, but certainly acceptable.

In the letter to John of Synada, Germanos begins by affirming that “The faith, the worship and the veneration of Christians is directed to the one and only God ... Our praise and worship are addressed to him alone.” This one and only God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the faith of which we are baptized. Veneration of creatures is not to be countenanced, nor veneration of kings and rulers. If kings and rulers are said to be venerated, this does not mean that they are worshipped “alongside the one who is God.” It is striking that, though Germanos uses both λατρεία, usually translated as worship, and προσκύνησις, usually translated as veneration, he seems not to make any clear distinction between them. This is despite such a distinction having already been drawn in the 7th century by Leontios of Neapolis (and maybe Stephen of Bostra), confining λατρεία to God and using προσκύνησις more generally, though perhaps this should be better put in terms of a distinction in the meaning and purpose of προσκύνησις, understood as the act of bowing down, prostration, an element of Byzantine court ritual, readily incorporated in the ritual of the Byzantine Church (along with much else), the distinction being between προσκύνησις expressing λατρεία, due only to God, and προσκύνησις expressing τιμή, respect or honour—which could be paid to our fellow human beings, saints, and to saints through their icons. Germanos shows no interest in such careful distinction. Indeed, as Richard Price has put it in more general terms, the fact that Germanos echoes themes familiar from a more thoroughgoing defence of icons, both before him and after him, “should not, however, distract us from noticing where he stops short of the full iconophile case.”¹¹ It is the saints depicted in the icons who have “received grace from God to distribute his blessings to us—cures of disease and rescue from dangers”; Germanos does not focus on the cult of icons themselves. Furthermore, on one of the few cases when Germanos seems to commend the veneration of icons, careful reading reveals something rather different. In the letter to Thomas of Klaudiupolis, he says,

Nor should it scandalize anyone that lights and fragrant incense are placed before the images of saints, for this rite was devised as a symbol in honour of those who rest with Christ and whose honour passes over to

11 Price, I. 254.

him, for, as the wise Basil said, ‘the honour paid to the good among our fellow servants is a display of good will towards our common master’. For the perceptible lights are a symbol of the immaterial and divine enlightenment, while the exhalation of aromas is a symbol of pure and total inspiration and replenishment by the Holy Spirit.

Germanos is not exactly commending such marks of veneration as lights and incense, rather giving a spiritualizing interpretation of accepted custom. It is striking, in the context of how the controversy developed, that the passage from Basil cited is not that which was to be frequently cited, from his *On the Holy Spirit*, about the honour given to the image passing to the archetype,¹² but a more general remark that honour paid within the Christian community is itself an expression of “good will towards our common master”: less technical, but expressive of the solidarity between Christ and the Christian community.

The Incarnation is also part of Germanos’ argument against the iconoclasts, as we might expect, given the argument of canon 82 of the Trullan Council, but it is much less prominent than one might expect. Germanos’ argument (in the letters to both John and Thomas) begins by rebutting any accusation of idolatry by declaring that worship is due to the one and only God, who is a Trinity of persons. In the letter to John, he continues by asserting that this is the “teaching of the Word of God made man, one of the same holy and incomprehensible divine Trinity”: the mention of the Incarnation serves to underline the Christian teaching in the incomprehensibility of the Christian Trinity. It is some lines later that we find Germanos justifying portrayal of the Incarnate God: “we fashion the image of his human figure and of his human form in the flesh and not of his incomprehensible and invisible Godhead,” such images assuring us of the reality of Incarnation. He then moves on to justify images of the Mother of God in very similar terms, as well as images of the martyrs, apostles, and prophets. In all these cases, he seems to argue, images serve to deepen our love and reverence of God. Indeed, Germanos is so concerned to demonstrate that all this serves the worship of God, that he, maladroitly, says that these images are portrayed “in memory of [that is, the saints’] bravery and authentic service of God, not as if making them ‘sharers in the divine nature’ or attributing to them the honour and veneration that are owed to the divine glory and authority”—despite the fact, as Richard Price notes, that the citation from 2 Peter 1:4 *promises* such participation in the divine nature to all called by God. It is precisely the assumption of human flesh by the Word of God that

12 Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 45 (PG 32: 149C).

enables us to depict the incarnate God, but this does not form the fulcrum of Germanos' argument.

We find much the same, at somewhat greater length, in the letter to Thomas, where Germanos affirms that God's "ineffable nature is utterly beyond knowledge and investigation, ... invisible, infinite and totally immutable," but the argument continues by affirming that we have knowledge of God through the created world, made by him and in which his activity is manifest in his providence. This itself, it seems to be suggested, prevents idolatry, for in perceiving the splendour of the created order the "intellect of the soul" is led back to God the creator. This argument, essentially against idolatry, leads to the value of depictions of "holy men who resisted sin to the point of shedding their blood"—prophets and apostles. It is only after dwelling on this at some length that Germanos mentions depictions of "the Lord's form according to the flesh" as serving to refute docetic heretics to deny the reality of Christ's humanity, and helping those who lack the strength to "ascend to the height of spiritual contemplation and need bodily perception to confirm what they have heard." Again somewhat maladroitly, Germanos suggests that the mystery "hidden from the ages" "will be found not to have credibility from hearing alone (for 'faith comes from hearing,' as the apostle says¹³) but to be imprinted on the minds of beholders by sight as well and to exclaim powerfully that 'God was manifested in the flesh and gained the belief of the world'"—which comes close to contradicting the verse cited from St Paul. Again, appeal to the Incarnation is part of a broader argument about the apprehension of the invisible God, not an assertion that in the Incarnation God becomes visible.

Several times (once in the letter to John of Synada and twice in the letter to Thomas of Klaudiupolis) Germanos defends icons against the charge that they take away from God the "worship in spirit and truth,"¹⁴ due to him alone. His response is that icons do not take away such worship in spirit and truth "owed to the incomprehensible and inaccessible Godhead," but rather "display ... the love we have rightly conceived for the true servants of God"; "It is not the mixture of wood and colours that is venerated, but it is the invisible God in the bosom of the Father who receives veneration in spirit and truth ..."; again "the people of Christ 'venerate in his holy court the king of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible and only wise God,' 'performing veneration in spirit and truth' and offering without cease every praise and ascription of glory to the life-giving Trinity." From this last example, Germanos derives a principle: "It is necessary not merely to consider what is done but to examine in every case the purpose of the action."

¹³ Rom. 10:17.

¹⁴ Cf. John 4:24.

In short, Germanos sees nothing wrong with the use of images in Christian worship, but they play a secondary role: not to be denied, but not to be exaggerated. He has no sense of the later conviction of the necessity of the icon in Christian worship that we find in the later iconophiles, nor does he see the Incarnation as a critical factor in the justification of images, as later iconophiles will do.

2 St John of Damascus

John of Damascus was, as we have seen, one of the three opponents of iconoclasm condemned at the Council of Hiereia, and was clearly regarded as the most formidable of the three, meriting not just a line of condemnation but a fourfold denunciation:

To Mansur, the ill-named and Saracen-minded, anathema!
 To Mansur, the worshipper of images and writer of falsities, anathema!
 To Mansur, the insulter of Christ and plotter against his kingdom, anathema!
 To Mansur, the teacher of impiety and false interpreter of divine scripture, anathema!

As we shall see, John's attack on the iconoclasts could well have riled the emperor, who is rebuked directly as a heretic, comparable to Mani; nevertheless, it is unclear what the Fathers of the Council of Hiereia knew about John, other than his reputation, for there is no trace of knowledge of his arguments in their proceedings. This is perhaps less surprising than it seems at first sight. John's attacks on imperial policy would have been regarded as seditious, and possession of them therefore dangerous; indeed, there is little evidence of knowledge of John's works at all in Constantinople, in distinction from his reputation, until the last quarter of the 9th century; neither the 8th-century nor the 9th-century iconodules build on his arguments, nor is he mentioned in Photios' *Bibliotheca*.

John wrote three treatises against "those who attack the holy images," or it might be more accurate to say that he wrote against the iconoclasts three times, for the three treatises are not at all independent: the second treatise makes use of large parts of the first, and is explicitly a simplified version of it; the third treatise follows the second quite closely to begin with, and then develops a systematic theological section, based largely on the first treatise.¹⁵ From that the order of the treatises is clear. The second treatise was apparently

15 In Kotter's edition the three treatises are presented synoptically, making clear the nature of their mutual dependence. Henceforth, in references, *Imag.* = *Contra imaginum*

written when the news of the deposition of Patriarch Germanos reached Jerusalem, therefore shortly after 730; the first knows nothing of this, and so must be between 726 and 730. The third treatise is more of a cool treatise than an impassioned tract and, given that the florilegium attached to it is very much longer than the earlier florilegia,¹⁶ it is likely that it was composed somewhat later, say in the early 740s (but not late enough for John to have learnt about the way Leo III's son, Constantine V, was seeking to justify iconoclasm in the late 740s).¹⁷ Despite their overlap, they are very different treatises.

The first is an immediate response to the news of iconoclasm. John declares his reluctance to get involved in controversy, but quickly gets into his stride with an impassioned defence of icons and their veneration. He begins with a solemn, quasi-credal affirmation of his belief in one God in Trinity, underlining that his worship is addressed to God alone. As he affirms this, he introduces what, for him, is the fundamental argument against the iconoclasts, namely the way in which the invisible God has become visible in the Incarnation:

I venerate one God, one Godhead, but I also worship a trinity of persons, God the Father and God the Son incarnate and God the Holy Spirit, one God. I do not venerate the creation instead of the creator, but I venerate the Creator, created for my sake, who came down to his creation without being lowered or weakened that he might glorify my nature and bring about communion with the divine nature. I venerate together with the King and God the purple robe of his body, not as a garment, nor as a

calumniatores oratio, followed by the number of the treatise and paragraph (and sometimes line numbers, from Kotter's edition).

- 16 Like the florilegium attached to the second treatise, the florilegium attached to the third treatise is appended to the treatise, and not an integral part of the treatise, as with the first. It is possible that the florilegium to the third treatise is later than the Damascene (it is preserved in only one manuscript, but the whole manuscript tradition of the treatises against the iconoclasts is sparse); nevertheless, it is based on the other florilegia.
- 17 This is the traditional view, based on the apparent evidence of the treatises themselves. It has, however, been argued by Paul Speck that John Damascene is in fact responding to the arguments of Constantine V. This involves dating the treatises to the late 740s at the earliest and entails regarding the extant text of the treatises as interpolated, for no reason other than tailoring the treatises to the theory. Speck's views have been endorsed by Brubaker and Haldon: *Sources*, 248–49; *History*, 183–89. The principal article of Speck's is: "Eine Interpolation in de Bilderreden des Johannes von Damaskos," *BZ* 82 (1989), 114–17. For more on the dating, see Bernard Flusin, "I 'Discorsi contro i detrattori delle immagini' di Giovanni di Damasco e l'esordio del primo iconoclasmo," in S. Chialà, L. Cremaschi, and V. Kontouma (eds.), *Giovanni di Damasco: Un padre al sorgere dell'Islam* (Bose: 2006), 53–86.

fourth person (God forbid!), but as called to be and to have become unchangeably equal to God and the source of anointing. For the nature of the flesh did not become Godhead, but as the Word became flesh immutably, remaining what it was, so also the flesh became the Word without losing what it was, being rather made equal to the Word hypostatically. Therefore, I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as he became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood. I do not depict the invisible Godhead, but I depict God made visible in the flesh.¹⁸

Much of the ensuing argument turns on the meaning of the key terms: image (εἰκὼν) and veneration (προσκύνησις). In the case of image, or icon, John sets out the centrality of this term in Christian theology, illustrating the different roles this key term plays, from characterizing the relationships within the Trinity—the Son as image of the Father, for instance—to describing the way in which God relates to the created order through his divine intentions, images of which are brought into effect through providence, the way in which visual images give us some inkling of invisible realities, the way in which the Old Testament contains images that foreshadow the New, and the way in which images, both in writing and in painting, remind us of past events and people. Attacking images, John seems to be saying, is not just to attack the actual icons, but more seriously to threaten something central to the whole fabric of Christian theology.

The other key term, veneration, is then subject to the same drawing of distinctions. The Greek word usually translated “veneration” is προσκύνησις, which properly speaking refers to an *action*, the action of bowing down to the ground, making a prostration. In drawing his distinctions, John points out that there are different reasons for making such an act of veneration: in relation to God, we bow down to express our exclusive worship (Greek: λατρεία) of God, but we also bow down, and venerate, other things, people and sacred things, out of respect (Greek: τιμή). In fact, these two senses of veneration are related: we venerate things, places and people associated with God, as a way of showing respect to what belongs to God; but God alone is the object of our worship, which we also express through veneration, or bowing down. These two sets of arguments make clear two fundamental points: first, the importance of the image as a way of discerning anything at all about God and his purposes, and secondly the difference between the veneration of icons, which is a matter of

¹⁸ *Imag.* 1. 4.

expressing honour, τιμή, and idolatry, which is offering λατρεία to something other than God, something forbidden by the second commandment (or, in another numeration, the second part of the first commandment).

As we have noticed in relation to Germanos, it seems that it was the charge of idolatry drawn above all from the Second Commandment that was given as justification for the first wave of iconoclasm. This is confirmed by the way John opens his argument, as we have seen, by firmly proclaiming his belief in one God, and his rejection of idolatry. It is noteworthy that it is not the second commandment that John cites but what appears to be Deut. 6:13 (in the form in which it appears in Matt. 4:10 and in the Codex Alexandrinus): κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις ("you shall venerate the Lord your God and him alone shall you worship"), which had already been interpreted by Anastasios of Antioch as making a distinction between προσκύνησις and λατρεία, the latter only to be made to God.¹⁹ This distinction, which John also makes, between προσκύνησις and λατρεία, could be thought to be undermined by the second commandment (οὐ προσκυνήσεις αὐτοῖς οὐδὲ μὴ λατρεύσης αὐτοῖς, "you shall not venerate them or worship them": Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9), read as equating προσκύνησις and λατρεία in a hendyadis, John only cites the second commandment once (in *Imag.* I . 6, repeated in *Imag.* III. 8), in the form found in Deuteronomy (again, according to the reading of Codex Alexandrinus).

In this first treatise John also appeals to worship found in the Old Testament, in which acts of veneration were offered to all sorts of things, such as the ark of the covenant and Aaron's rod, as well as the images of the cherubim, made of bronze, and furthermore grounds his argument on the fact that matter is created, and so not to be despised, as iconoclasm might seem to imply, but even more on the fact that the Son of God himself assumed a material form in the Incarnation. John dwells on the value and beauty of matter and suggests that the iconoclast disdain for matter betrays an inclination towards Manichæism.

But for John the strongest argument of all, introduced early on in the treatise, is based on the Incarnation: even if the veneration of images was forbidden in the Old Testament (which, he maintains, it was not), because God has no visible form, this situation has changed as a result of the Incarnation, in which the invisible and incomprehensible God has taken on himself a material form. The first treatise continues with an appeal to unwritten tradition, in which he invokes a famous passage from St Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*,²⁰ rejecting the appeal made by the iconoclasts to passages allegedly from St Epiphanius,²¹ and

19 See Price, I. 301–2, and n. 271.

20 Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 45 (PG 32: 149C), quoted in *Imag.* I. 21. 41–3.

21 *Imag.* I. 25.

then continues by citing a collection of patristic texts (a florilegium), on which he provides a running commentary.²² He concludes by taking the emperor to task in no uncertain terms, calling his actions “piratical” (λῆστροικὰ) in usurping the role of the bishops in seeking to define Christian belief.²³

What is amazing about this first treatise, apparently written in the heat of the moment, is the confidence of the argument and its theological depth. Part of the reason for this emerges in the florilegium, the collection of patristic quotations, with which it concludes, for there we find, not only John’s sure-footed appeal to authority, but also some hints of earlier controversy in which Christians had already been forced to defend the veneration of icons (and the Cross and the relics of the saints). Most striking, in this respect, are the long extracts from Leontios, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus.²⁴ John’s quotations are from a treatise against the Jews that is otherwise lost (other works of Leontios survive, mainly works of hagiography). Clearly Leontios, in the middle of the 7th century (he was one of the signatories of the Council of Lateran in 649, which condemned the Christological heresies of Monenergism and Monotheletism), had found himself required to defend Christian practice against Jews, who accused Christians of idolatry because of their veneration of the Cross, relics of the saints, and icons. This fits well the situation in the first half of the 7th century, when, especially after the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians in 614, there was intense antagonism between Christians and Jews, which is not likely to have abated after the rise of Islam.²⁵ Leontios is clear that the actual practice of worship under the Old Covenant was much richer than that of his Jewish contemporaries and is explicit that honouring sacred people and places for God’s sake is very different from idolatry. This explains part of John’s immediate ability to respond to Byzantine iconoclasm. More broadly, however, the clear sense of what Orthodox Christianity stood for is

22 The florilegium proper begins at *Imag.* I. 28 and continues to *Imag.* I. 65.

23 *Imag.* I. 66. 13.

24 *Imag.* I. 54–7, which is repeated in *Imag.* II. 50–3. A somewhat different selection from Leontios of Neapolis is found in the florilegium to the third treatise: *Imag.* III. 84–9, which is closer to the text included in the florilegium of Nicaea II (*ACO*, 348–70; Price, 291–300). All the texts of Leontios can be found in Thümmel, *Frühgeschichte*, 340–53, with German translation and some discussion, *ibid.*, 127–36. Further discussion in Price, 242–5. See also, for more detail about the transmission of the fragments of Leontios included in florilegia, Alexander Alexakis, *Codex Parisinus Graecus 115 and its Archetype* (Washington, DC: 1996), 190–92.

25 As Déroche has argued: see his “L’Apologie contre les juifs de Léontios de Néapolis,” in Gilbert Dagron and Vincent Déroche (eds.), *Juifs et chrétiens en Orient byzantin* (Paris: 2010), 381–451, at 382.

something that John inherited from the Palestinian monks whose numbers he had joined. The Palestinian monks, the guardians of the Holy Sites, had a long reputation as defenders of Orthodoxy: the Christological Orthodoxy of the Ecumenical Councils, especially Chalcedon; they constituted “le foyer essentiel du chalcédonisme,” as Bernard Flusin has put it.²⁶ During the century after the Arab conquest of the Near East, they developed a facility for defending and defining Orthodoxy against all comers. This was the heritage into which John had entered. It is also possible that, although the form of the treatises we have envisage Byzantine iconoclasm, John had also encountered local iconoclasm, or at least iconophobia, though the historicity of the sometimes mentioned edict of Caliph Yazid II is debated.²⁷

The other two treatises, or his two reworkings of the treatise, are rather different from the first. The second is explicitly a simplified version of the first, which some found rather difficult (“Some of the children of the Church have enjoined me to do this, because the first was not completely clear to everyone”),²⁸ but it is also a response to further developments in Byzantine iconoclasm, principally the emperor’s deposition (as John understood it) of Patriarch Germanos, and also news about iconoclasm in Cyprus. It is, in my view, a drastic simplification, and embraces a form of polemic that is potentially ugly. John simplifies the argument from the Incarnation, so that it takes this form: the Jews were forbidden to make images, because they were disposed to idolatry, but Christians, who believe in the Incarnation, are free from that propensity and so may and must make icons. The anti-Jewish supersessionism (i.e., the Jews belong to the past, and Christians have supplanted them) is potentially quite ugly, though its immediate polemical purpose is to smear the iconoclasts, who feared idolatry on the part of Christians, with being Jewish, or having Judaizing tendencies. Most of the rest of the treatise is a sharp rebuke to the emperor for involving himself in religious matters that are none of his business. In this section, John, who, so far as we know, never set foot on Byzantine soil, attacks the emperor as *his emperor*, and has the tone of voice of a Byzantine churchman. He repeats his accusation of piracy against the emperor from the first treatise, but makes it more central. John’s attitude here poses interesting questions about his own sense of self-identity: who did he think he was—the subject of the caliph or

26 Bernard Flusin, *Saint Anastase le Perse et l'histoire de la Palestine au début du VII^e siècle* (Paris: 1992), II, 59.

27 See Price, II, 385 and n. 14, with references to articles by Sidney Griffith which suggest the relevance of local iconoclasm to John’s arguments. For a defence of the historicity of Yazid’s decree see Chapter 11 of this volume.

28 *Imag.* II, 1.

the fearless servant of the emperor? It is striking that John was by no means alone among Christians living under Islam in regarding himself as Roman (or Byzantine).

This second treatise does, however, introduce a couple of significant new points. The first rebuts the argument that veneration of icons entails the veneration of matter. John argues that this is evidently not so, for if the image on the icon is defaced, it ceases to be an icon and so may be destroyed by fire without any sacrilege.²⁹ The second puts forward a fundamental argument for icons: namely, that "God himself first made an image and shows us images," by making human kind in the image of God, and further by manifesting himself in the Old Testament in theophanies, which are images of God rather than manifestations of the very being of God Himself.³⁰ Neither of these arguments appears in the first treatise; the first does not appear in the third treatise either, the second argument, however, is thoroughly integrated into the long, systematic second part of the third,³¹ and is the starting-point of his defence of icon veneration in his *On the Orthodox Faith* (*expos.* 89).³²

The third treatise is different again. It adopts the simplified polemical argument of the second treatise, but then moves into an altogether more elevated key. After recalling one of the *Leitmotiven* of his *On the Orthodox Faith*, namely that as humans are twofold, material and spiritual, so too must the Christian Faith be, which brings God's message to humankind, John goes on to present a lengthy and systematic exposition of the nature of the icon, both its various kinds and how and by whom they are made and follows this by a similarly systematic account of the meaning of veneration, προσκύνησις.

More far-reaching, however, is John's analysis of the significance of image. An image is "a likeness and paradigm and expression of something, showing in itself what is depicted in the image"; it is never completely like its model, otherwise there would be identity (III. 16). The purpose of an image is "the manifestation and display of the hidden," hidden either because invisible, or not present whether in place or time: the image leads us to this hidden reality (III. 17). But the heart of John's exposition turns on different meanings of the word "image." He distinguishes six meanings, adding to the five listed in the first treatise the way in which the human is an image of the divine. These six meanings are: first, the natural image, as a son is an image of the father

29 Cf. *Imag.* II. 19. 10–13.

30 Cf. *Imag.* II. 20. 15–26.

31 *Imag.* III. 20, 26.

32 *Expositio fidei* 89, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, II (Berlin: 1973), 206–8.

(and more particularly, as the Son of God is the image of God the Father); second, the images or paradigms, “which are called predeterminations by Saint Dionysios,”³³ within God of what is to be; third, human kind as created in the image of God, manifest both in the trinitarian structure of the human soul as intellect, reason and spirit, and in human freewill and human rule over the rest of creation³⁴; fourth, there are images that use bodily forms to represent the spiritual world, necessary for human beings, composed of body and soul, if they are to form some conception of the spiritual³⁵; fifth, there are images in the Old Testament that prefigure the realities of the New—the burning bush as a figure of the virginity of the Mother of God, or water as a figure of baptism³⁶; finally, there are images that recall the past, either in written form or in pictures.³⁷

This is not just a list, it is an evocation of the multitude of ways in which reality echoes reality, from the Father imaging forth the Son and the Son the Spirit in the life of the Trinitarian God, through the patterns of providence, humanity as an image of God, the way in which the visible world finds its reality in the spiritual world and images it forth, the images that shadow the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments, to the images that remind us of the past. It is a picture of the ways in which images establish relationships between realities: within the Trinity, between God and the providential ordering of the universe, between God and the inner reality of the human soul, between visible and invisible, between the past and the future, and the present and the past. The notion of image, in its different forms, is always mediating, always holding together in harmony. Images in the form of pictorial icons fit into this pattern in a quite humble way. But to deny the image is to threaten the whole fabric of harmony and mediation based on the image. At the heart of all this is humankind as the image of God: it is humanity in the image of God, that is the microcosm, the little universe, the bond of the cosmos. This world of signs was created by God, who first made images, when he created humankind in his image, and manifested himself in the Old Testament in theophanies that took the form of images: Adam hearing the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, Jacob fighting with God, Moses seeing God's back, Isaiah seeing him as a man seated on a throne, Daniel seeing the likeness of

33 εἰκόνες, παραδείγματα, προορισμοί: *Imag.* III. 19; for the latter referring to Dionysios the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 5. 8 (PG 3: 824C).

34 *Imag.* III. 20.

35 *Imag.* III. 21.

36 *Imag.* III. 22.

37 *Imag.* III. 23.

man and as Son of man, coming to the Ancient of Days.³⁸ And creating human kind in his image, he created him to make images.

John's approach entails an appreciation of the imagination, something unusual in the Byzantine ascetic tradition and in the Platonic tradition, to which it is indebted; for it is the imagination that receives images in the human mind.³⁹ This appreciation of the imagination remained part of iconophile theology. For instance, in one of his letters, Theodore of Stoudios includes a defence of the imagination as part of his defence of images.⁴⁰

John's conviction of the necessity of images and their correct understanding is the most theologically interesting aspect of his defence of the making and veneration of images: it is fundamental, it is even *necessary*, and this necessity applies, too, to the depictions of Christ, the Mother of God, and the saints. John goes well beyond Germanos' defence of icons as unobjectionable: he argues that icons are necessary; that rejection of icons entails a spiritualizing anti-materialism and will find it difficult to realize the centrality of the Incarnation, in which the invisible Word of God became visible and tangible. An aspect of his analysis of images which needs some untangling concerns how they function as images. "Every image makes manifest and demonstrates something hidden,"⁴¹ a paraphrase of the first citation in the extended florilegium appended to the third treatises, from Dionysios the Areopagite: "Truly visible things are manifest images of things invisible."⁴² The patristic citation that comes to express most clearly how an image (any kind of image) works is that from Basil's *On the Holy Spirit* that "the honour offered to the image passes over to the archetype [or original]" (ἡ τῆς εἰκόνης τιμὴ ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτότυπον διαβαίνει), cited with its full context (that is, veneration of the image of the emperor, for "the image of the emperor is said to be the emperor") in all three florilegia;⁴³ the phrase itself is cited elsewhere: in the body of the argument of the first treatise,⁴⁴ and in a comment on another patristic citation (in both the first and second treatise, with ἀναβαίνει, "ascends," rather than διαβαίνει).⁴⁵ The first citation justifies making and venerating images, not just of Christ and his Mother, but of "the saints, as friends of God, who, struggling against sin to the

38 Cf. *Imag.* III. 26.

39 Cf. *Imag.* I. 11.

40 Theodore of Stoudios, *Ep.* 380. 167–73, Georgios Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, (Berlin: 1992).

41 *Imag.* III. 17. 2–3.

42 *Imag.* III. 43, quoting from Dionysios the Areopagite, *ep.* 10 (PG 3: 117A).

43 Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 45 (PG 32: 149C), quoted in *Imag.* I. 35; II. 31; III. 48.

44 *Imag.* I. 21. 41–2.

45 *Imag.* I. 51. 8–9; II. 47. 8–9.

point of blood, have both imitated Christ by shedding their blood for him, who shed his blood for them, and lived a life following his footsteps.”⁴⁶ We record their deeds, John goes on to say (presumably both in writing about them and depicting their exploits), “as ones who have been sanctified through them and as a stimulus to zealous imitation,” and caps this by the phrase from Basil: “For the honour offered to the image passes over to the archetype.”⁴⁷ In his comment on a passage cited from Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Making of Humankind*, in which Gregory used the example of the way in which a painter uses colour to represent the beauty of the original in the image (itself an illustration of the way in which the divine beauty cannot be represented in colour, but only in virtue), John comments that though the divine splendour cannot be represented in colour, the Son of God in human form can be represented thus, and uses the citation from Basil in support of his comment: “how should the image not be honoured and venerated, not as God, but as the image of God made flesh?”⁴⁸

This last example points to something that has perhaps not often enough puzzled those trying to understand the arguments of the iconophiles, John Damascene in particular. There are three arguments here, each of which would achieve its purpose perfectly well: the first concerning the functioning of the image, honour addressed to which passes over to the original; the second concerning the distinction between veneration expressing honour or respect, and veneration expressing worship (which sometimes seems to shade into a distinction between veneration and worship); and the third arguing that, in the Incarnation, the invisible Word of God became visible as incarnate, becoming, in short, God visible. The last argument would seem to entail that worship, *λατρεία*, can (and should) be offered to God Incarnate, because he is God, and it is not clear to me why, if “the image of the emperor is said to be the emperor,” why it should not follow that “the image of Christ is said to be Christ,” so that veneration expressing worship can be offered to the icon, as the honour offered to the icon passes over to the original, in this case Christ, God Incarnate. But, as we can see from the last example, this is not where John takes his argument: although the premise is that God can be seen as God Incarnate, why is it that “the image of God made flesh” is only honoured with veneration, rather than worshipped as God, since *θεὸς σαρκαώμενος* is God, *θεός*? The distinction between veneration and worship is enough to shield veneration of icons from the charge of idolatry. Similarly, the argument Basil presents would seem to

46 *Imag.* I. 21. 33–8.

47 *Imag.* I. 21. 39–42.

48 *Imag.* I. 51. 10–11; II. 47. 10–11.

justify worship being addressed to the icon, if there can indeed be an icon of God, which is secured by the argument from the Incarnation (Basil's citation would also justify honour paid to the icon of a saint or the Mother of God, as the honour passes to the original). But John seems to hold back from the natural conclusions of his arguments and, letting one argument short-circuit another, ends up by simply justifying veneration of honour being offered to the icon of Christ.

Nevertheless, the importance of John of Damascus for the realization of the centrality of the icon in Christian faith and worship can hardly be underestimated. Wherein, however, does this importance lie? Thomas F. X. Noble has argued that John's importance lies in rooting his defence of the icon in Christology. Indeed, his case is rather more precise: "John was the first to realize that the key issue was not nature but the more fundamental question of hypostasis."⁴⁹ In support he appeals to Gerhart B. Ladner's old, but fundamental, paper, "Der Bilderstreit und die Kunst-Lehren der byzantinischen und abendländischen Theologie."⁵⁰ However, in his article Ladner refers not just to John Damascene but also to Theodore of Stoudios. Theodore certainly saw the significance of that fact that in a picture it is the hypostasis that is being depicted, not the nature, but it seems to me that the Damascene does not exactly articulate this. He was fully aware of (by his time) nearly three centuries of reflection on and clarification of the Christological (originally Trinitarian) terminology of being or nature and hypostasis, οὐσία or φύσις and ὑπόστασις, so it can hardly be by chance that only once does he use the term ὑπόστασις in his treatises against the iconoclasts,⁵¹ and that in a purely (and precisely) Christological context (in Christ there is "divinity hypostatically united with it [sc. the flesh]"). It is true that in this penultimate paragraph of his first treatise he is, in effect, saying that what is depicted in a picture of Moses and Pharoah are people, persons, but he does not use the term ὑπόστασις to make this point, as Theodore will. Noble is certainly right to argue that the Damascene founds his defence of icons on the Incarnation with greater insight and clarity than any of his predecessors, and this is important, but it is just as important, it seems to me, to appreciate what he presents as an epistemological argument about the central place of the image in human understanding. He is, also, the first person we know of to cite the famous passage from Basil's *On the Holy Spirit* about the

49 Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009), 92.

50 In Gerhart B. Ladner, *Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies in History and Art*, 1 (Rome: 1983), 13–33 (originally published in *ZKG*, ser. 3, 50 [1931], 1–23).

51 *Mag.* 1. 67. 15.

way an image or icon functions: the text which was to become the key citation at the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

3 Iconoclast Arguments

As already argued, the justification offered for the destruction of icons in the reign of Leo III seems to have been that icons were idols, contravening the second commandment. This, however, is a deduction from the way in which Germanos and John reacted against iconoclasm; we have no direct evidence. Under Constantine V, the iconoclast argument became more elaborate, arguing that icons were not just idolatrous, but actually heretical, entailing either Nestorianism or Monophysitism, but this was embedded in a genuinely thoughtful argument about how Christ wanted himself to be remembered by his disciples: through icons or through taking bread and wine in the Eucharist and offering and consecrating them, as Christ commanded us to do “in memory of me,” εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (so 1 Cor. 11:24, and Luke 22:19, in some, but not all, manuscripts)?

Some such argument was set out in the “Enquiries” (*Peuseis*) of the emperor Constantine V, distributed to the bishops of the Empire in preparation for the synod he proposed to convoke to declare the orthodoxy of iconoclasm: the Council of Hiereia which met in 754.⁵² Our sources for the *Peuseis* are the later attacks on iconoclasm by Nikephoros, the 9th-century patriarch of Constantinople, who resigned over the reintroduction of iconoclasm by Leo V in 815, as well as the *horos* or definition of the Council of Hiereia, which is based on the argument of the *Peuseis*, though it did not endorse it entirely.

From these sources, we can, I think, venture to construct a carefully formed argument against icons, both their fashioning and their veneration.⁵³ First of all, what could be meant by a true icon? There followed two lines of attack arguing that a visual icon could be nothing more than “the deceptive painting of likenesses.” First, a true icon would need to be consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with the original, as the eternal Son was consubstantial with the Father—which was obviously not the case with a visual icon. This argument, pursued in Constantine’s *Peuseis*, did not make its way into the *horos* of the iconoclast synod. The other line of attack, however, did, an argument that drew on

52 On the Council of Hiereia, see Torsten Krannich, Christoph Schubert, and Claudia Sode, *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754* (Tübingen: 2002).

53 I have used the texts edited by Hermann Hennephof in *Textus Byzantinos ad Iconomachiam Pertinentes* (Leiden: 1969).

matters Christological. For an icon of Christ would have to depict one who was both God and man: if it simply depicted a man, it would have separated the humanity of Christ from his divinity, and thus fallen into the Nestorian heresy; if it was claimed that the depiction of the humanity of Christ also depicted his divinity, then his divinity would be circumscribed and made to form one nature with his humanity—the heresy of Monophysitism. Recalling, however, that icons were claimed by the iconodules to recall the memory of some holy person or event, the iconoclasts offered an alternative to the icon by claiming that the real way of remembering Christ was to do what he had asked his followers to do in his memory—that is, to celebrate the holy mystery of the Eucharist. Instead of an icon made by an artist, the true way of remembering Christ, the iconoclasts claimed, was in the Eucharist, which was a true type or figure—τύπος—of Christ. The series of extracts from the *Peuseis* concerning the Eucharist read thus:

According to his godhead he foresaw his death and resurrection and the ascent into the heavens, and that we who believe in him would preserve a continual memory of his Incarnation day and night ... And he commanded his holy disciples and apostles to pass on a type of his incarnation⁵⁴ in a way that pleased him; so that through the priestly service [τῆς ἱερατικῆς ἀναγωγῆς], if we take part according to the ordinance, we receive it as truly and properly his body ... And if we wish to understand the image of his body as something derived from that [sc. the body], we take this as the true form of his body ... For why? The body that we receive is an image of his body, having the form [μορφάζων] of his flesh, since it has become a type of his body ... Nor is any bread his body, just as neither is any wine his blood, but only that which has been taken up through the priestly rite from that which is made with hands to that which is not made with hands [διὰ τῆς ἱερατικῆς τελετῆς ἀναφερόμενος ἐκ τοῦ χειροποιήτου πρὸς τὸ ἀχειροποιήτον].⁵⁵

The steps of the argument are: first, we should remember Christ in the way he commanded us; secondly, this is through the bread and wine of the Eucharist, which are a τύπος and εἰκὼν of his body and blood; thirdly, here we find the true ἀχειροποίητος icon, the true icon “made without hands”; this type and image

54 Τύπον εἰς σῶμα αὐτοῦ: literally, I suppose, a type of [his coming] into a body.

55 Hennephof, *Textus Byzantinos*, §§ 165–8 (Mansi 13:333B–337C).

of Christ is only made through the proper priestly rite, the importance of this underlined by its being affirmed twice.

There are a couple of points worth emphasizing. First, we should recognize that this is intended to be an uncontroversial affirmation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The language of τύπος, in particular, is taken from the Eucharistic texts; as is well known, the Anaphora of St Basil, the one still the most commonly used at that time in the liturgy at the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, refers to τὰ ἀντίτυπα τοῦ ἁγίου σώματος καὶ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ σου. The use of the language of type and antitype is not at all meant to deny that the consecrated bread and wine is truly the body and blood of Christ. What the iconoclasts are saying is that the bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Christ made present in the Eucharist, and to express this they are simply using traditional, hallowed language. Secondly, there is the claim that the Eucharist is not just an icon, but an icon “made without hands” (ἀχειροποίητος). One argument in favour of icons was surely (though this argument is not mentioned in the justification of icons by such as St John Damascene) that there are icons “made without hands,” miraculous icons like the face of Christ impressed on the *Mandylion*, whose very existence demonstrates divine approval and authentication of such images. Such images “made without hands” had featured in Emperor Herakleios’ campaigns against the Persians, but they disappear from sight in the iconoclast controversy.⁵⁶ Finally, and closely related to this iconoclast attempt to undermine claims about icons “made without hands,” there is the stress on the “priestly rite” that effects the presence. In this context, it is relevant to recall that one of the iconoclast objections to icons was, as the *horos* of Hieria put it:

the evil name of the images falsely so called does not derive its existence from the tradition of Christ or of the apostles or the fathers, nor does it have a sacred prayer to sanctify it, so that it may in consequence be changed from being common to being holy, but it remains common and worthless, as the painter made it.⁵⁷

It is noteworthy that, in the response to this at the sixth session of Nicaea II, the fact that icons are not blessed is simply accepted: like many other sacred things—the sign of the cross and the sacred vessels and vestments⁵⁸ used in

⁵⁶ However, icons “made without hands” could be considered rather more akin to relics than icons. See Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: 2002), 24–7.

⁵⁷ *ACO*, 676; Price, II, 480.

⁵⁸ Implicitly, I would argue, from the mention of weavers; *ACO*, 680; Price, 482.

the Eucharist are mentioned—no rite of blessing is necessary. Icon painters stood within a tradition that could be traced back, it was claimed, through the Fathers, and in their icons they were required to follow traditional use (the details of tradition are not actually spelt out by the Council, indeed, there may have been, at this time, little in the way of details), but icons are holy because they depict holy people and holy events. Here is perhaps the heart of the iconoclast objection to icons, or at least the heart of imperial endorsement of iconoclasm, namely, that what was dangerous about icons was the way in which they provided apparently uncontrolled access to the holy. It was just such uncontrolled access to the holy that imperial iconoclasm was at pains to prevent. What was sought was control over access to the holy,⁵⁹ which the imperial iconoclasts believed would be secured by restriction of such access to three τύποι: the cross (part of the imperial cult since the time of Constantine), the church building (called a εἰκὼν καὶ τύπος of God by none other than St Maximos the Confessor),⁶⁰ and the mystery of the Eucharist—and of these, the latter two required priestly (indeed, in the case of churches, episcopal) consecration. In short, the iconoclast claim—and argument—was that the true “image and type” of Christ is the one he has provided us with, the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist; this is the true icon “made without hands”; and it can only be furnished through priestly consecration, that is consecration by a defined group over which the emperors could expect to exercise some real control.

It would, I think, be fair to say that the iconoclast argument that involved the Eucharist was not, in fact, *about* the Eucharist at all. Their argument was about the nature of the icon. They took for granted that in the Eucharist Christ was truly present under the types or figures of bread and wine and argued from this that the Eucharist was a—*the*—true, in some way consubstantial, image or icon of Christ. It was their iconophile opponents who turned what, for the iconoclasts, was an argument about the nature of the icon into an argument about the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist, but these iconophile opponents of the iconoclasm of Constantine v and his synod belong to the 9th century and the revival of iconoclasm under the Emperor Leo v, and are treated elsewhere in this volume.

59 As Sebastian Brock observed long ago at the end of his article in *Iconoclasm*, eds. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: 1977), 53–57, 57.

60 Maximos, *Mystagogia* 1, line 130: ed. C. Boudignon, *CCSG* 69 (Turnhout: 2011), 10.

4 The Council of Nicaea II

A final place to look for arguments about icons in the 8th century is in the proceedings of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held at Nicaea in 787. There are very thin pickings here: during the sixth session of Nicaea II, the *horos* of the Council of Hieria was read out by Bishop Gregory of Neokaisareia, one of the bishops who had attended the Council of Hieria, paragraph by paragraph, and refuted in a text (doubtless composed by Patriarch Tarasios and his assistants⁶¹), read out first by John, one of the deacons of Hagia Sophia, and later another deacon, Epiphanius. John barely engages with the argument of the *horos* and simply recites iconodule arguments in refutation. It is here, in this refutation, that the argument, based on the passage from Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*, comes into its own, namely, that the honour paid to the image passes over to the archetype. The *horos* itself of Nicaea II does not attempt any kind of elaborate argument in favour of icons, as did the *horos* of Hieria (in this Nicaea II is simply following synodical tradition, which declares the truth, rather than argues for it). Its novelty lies in not only endorsing the tradition but explicitly commanding the making and venerating of icons, "made in colours or mosaic or other fitting materials," alongside the figure of the Cross, saying that they "are to be dedicated in the holy churches of God, on sacred vessels and vestments, on walls and panels, in houses and in the streets," and that they are to be accorded "greeting and the veneration of honour, not indeed the true worship corresponding to our faith, which pertains to the divine nature alone" in this sharing in the honour accorded to the Cross and the books of the Holy Gospels: all this justified by the now-familiar citation from Basil the Great.⁶²

In putting icons alongside the Holy Gospels, the fathers of the synod engage in a dialectic between word and image that has a longstanding place in the rhetorical tradition, not just in Christian rhetors but among pagans, too. In the proceedings of the synod, Richard Price has argued, the fathers "remained embedded in a patristic culture that accorded unique authority to the written word."⁶³ In the next century the balance will tip in favour of images over words, in part encouraged by the widespread conviction among philosophers throughout classical antiquity and late antiquity that sight is the sharpest of the senses. One of the highest achievements of classical rhetoric was *ekphrasis*, making the rhetor's audience experience something depicted simply though

61 Note the striking common ground between the Refutation and the *Horos* of 787: see Price, II, 554–5.

62 The text of the *Horos* of Nicaea II can be found in ACO, 820–8; Price, 561–66.

63 Price, II, 552.

words. A common technique was to exclaim to the audience that words cannot measure up to what you can see, and then conjure up in the hearers what they would experience in seeing what the rhetor was describing. The first citation from St Basil in the florilegium with which John Damascene's first treatise against the iconoclasts ends (also included in the florilegium of Nicaea II) gives an example of such *ekphrasis*. The homily is on Barlaam the martyr, a general martyred for his confession of Christ:

Rise up now for me, O radiant painters of athletic achievements, and magnify the mutilated image of the general by your arts. The context in which he was crowned, described more dimly by me, you make radiant with the colours of your wisdom. Overwhelmed by you, I will refrain from describing the martyr's deeds of valour. I see the struggle depicted most exactly by you, with his hand in the fire; I see the combatant, radiant with joy, depicted in the image. (*Imag.* 1. 34)

It is this greater power of visual over the imagination, to which Basil appeals rhetorically, that is on the threshold of taking the place of the image to a supreme place in the worship of the Church. Nicaea II does not exactly get that far, but lays the seeds for such a development in the 9th-century iconodules.

The final phrase of the presentation of the case for the icon in the *horos* of 787 introduces a refinement (not found, as such, in John the Deacon's *Refutatio*) that will become a central premise in the iconodule theology of the 9th century: "For the honour paid to the image passes over to the prototype, and whoever venerates the image venerates in it the hypostasis of the one who is represented."⁶⁴ I confess I wonder about the translation of hypostasis, as it is a technical word that will enable Theodore the Studite, in particular, to draw the theology of the icon into the realm of Christology, and argue that the hypostasis of the icon is identical with the hypostasis of the one depicted. As Price says, "this raises a problem that the council fails to address. If the image is to receive the same degree of veneration as its prototype, the images of Christ should receive not the mere veneration of honour but worship (λατρεία) itself."⁶⁵ We have already encountered this problem in John Damascene; the synod's use of ὑπόστασις here only intensifies the problem. Or does it? Should ὑπόστασις be taken in its technical (that is, theological) sense? Price refers in justification to the definition of *hypostasis* earlier in the *Refutatio*, but there the

⁶⁴ ACO, 826; Price, II, 565.

⁶⁵ Price, II, 554.

context is clearly Christological. Could not *ὑπόστασις* simply mean “reality”? Probably not, for it is difficult to believe that in a formal synodical *horos* the word *ὑπόστασις* could be used without awareness of the theological (and especially Christological) concerns that have come to haunt it.

Nevertheless, the *horos* of Nicaea II presents in a summary form themes that will form the backbone of the fully-fledged defence of icons and their veneration in the following century.⁶⁶

66 I would like to acknowledge my debt to Richard Price, who kindly read my first draft of this chapter and made many helpful suggestions.

The Theological Argument about Images in the 9th Century

Ken Parry

What follows is an overview of the iconophile arguments of three 9th-century authors, namely, the monastic leader Theodore the Stoudite (d. 826) and the Patriarch Nikephoros (d. 828) in Constantinople, then the Melkite Bishop Theodore Abū Qurrah (d. ca. 830) in Syria-Palestine. It claims to be neither comprehensive nor definitive, but rather provides a summary and discussion of some of the salient points taken from their writings. We begin with the situation in Constantinople before turning to Syria-Palestine.

1 The Situation in Constantinople

From a Byzantine iconophile perspective the second period of iconoclasm was one mainly of consolidation, with some additional themes being introduced, such as Aristotelian logic terminology and the concept of hypostasis.¹ There is nevertheless a marked shift in the quality of the arguments of 9th-century iconophiles from those of the 8th century. While this is true of the iconophiles, it is less true of the iconoclasts because of the lack of surviving texts that propose anything new. It might be thought that the refutation of the Iconoclast Council of 754 by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 would provide the basis on which the theology of this period developed, but there are few appeals to the *Acta* of this council.² Neither Theodore the Stoudite nor the Patriarch Nikephoros could foresee the outcome of their attempts to refute Second Iconoclasm, especially when they were subject to exile, imprisonment,

1 Although this concept is implicit in John of Damascus' iconology, it receives further development in his later works, see Anna Zhyrkova, "John of Damascus' Philosophy of the Individual and the Theology of the Icons," in Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniosoglou (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge: 2017), 431–46; Christophe Erismann, "A World of Hypostases: John of Damascus' Rethinking of Aristotle's Categorical Ontology," *Studia Patristica* 50 (2010), 251–69.

2 Richard Price, *The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea* (787), 2 vols (Liverpool: 2018), 62–63.

and physical abuse. Both died before the so-called Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843, but their theological writings were preserved for posterity.³ The documented theology of the iconoclasts, however, is known mainly from what has been incorporated into iconophile sources, most notably in the works of the Patriarch Nikephoros.

We catch a glimpse of the official iconoclast position of the 9th century in the *Letter of Emperors Michael II and Theophilos to Louis the Pious* from 824.⁴ In it they denounce the veneration of icons and suggest that they be hung high up rather than low down so that they are out of reach of worshippers. This was suggested by Leo V (813–820) in his discussion with the patriarch Nikephoros,⁵ and is referred to by Theodore the Stoudite (see below). The iconoclast emperors decry the replacement of crosses with icons and the practice of lighting candles and burning incense before them, as well as hanging material ornaments on them. They also denounce the practice of using icons as baptismal godparents for children, a tradition sanctioned by Theodore the Stoudite in one of his letters.⁶ In addition, they disapprove of icons being used for tonsuring postulants for the monastic life (letting their shaved hair fall on the icon), the scraping of pigments from icons and mixing them with the Eucharistic elements, and the offering of consecrated bread on icons to communicants. These and other practices they maintain were forbidden by the iconoclast bishops at their local synod of 815.⁷

In his *Refutatio et Eversio*, a refutation of the Iconoclast Council of 815 written in the early 820s, which preserves the *Definition* (*Horos*) and florilegium of that council, Nikephoros argues that the iconoclasts confuse the difference between painting (*γραπτός*) and circumscription (*περίγραπτος*), because painters in painting an image do not circumscribe the subject they represent. Circumscription happens in three ways, he says, in space, in time and by apprehension, but the power of the painter does not lie in circumscribing Christ in his icon, and neither is his icon offered the worship of adoration (*σέβασμα*

3 Vladimir Baranov, "The Iconophile Fathers," in Ken Parry (ed.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics* (Oxford: 2015), 338–52.

4 On this letter, see Vladimir Baranov, "Constructing the Underground Community: The Letters of Theodore the Studite and the Letter of Emperors Michael II and Theophilos to Louis the Pious," *Scrinium* 6 (2010), 230–59.

5 Paul Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: 1958), 128; Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: 2011), 366–72.

6 *Ep.* 17, 1–14, ed. Georgios Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, 1 (Berlin: 1990), 48.

7 Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Toronto: 1986), 157–158.

λατρείας).⁸ Here he repeats arguments found in his earlier *Three Refutations Against Constantine v*, a work we will be looking at later. He also defends the Empress Irene (sole r. 797–802) against iconoclast attacks of “feminine simplicity” for restoring icons at the Second Council of Nicaea, while stressing that her intention was to bring peace to the Church.⁹ It is of interest to find Nikephoros observing that the iconoclasts of Second Iconoclasm, unlike their predecessors in the 8th century, do not refer to their earlier Council of 754 as ecumenical.¹⁰

2 Theodore the Stoudite (759–826)

It was under the influence of his uncle Plato that the young Theodore adopted the monastic life. Plato himself had left his position in the imperial service to become a monk on Mt Olympus in Bithynia, where Theodore and other members of his family joined him. It was because of Theodore’s condemnation of the second marriage of Emperor Constantine vi (790–797) that he was arrested, beaten, and exiled from Bithynia to Thessaloniki in 797. Theodore became *hegoumenos* of the Stoudios Monastery in 799 at the age of 40, where he instituted monastic reforms as well as involving himself in the politics of the capital.¹¹ It was his reaction to the outbreak of second iconoclasm in 815 under Emperor Leo v that saw him imprisoned and banished for the iconophile cause. It was most likely during his years in exile from 815 to 821 that he composed his *Three Refutations Against the Iconoclasts*,¹² using the question-and-answer form, a literary device to refute various arguments put forward by an iconoclast.¹³ It is this work particularly that demonstrates Theodore’s

8 Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, ed. Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, *CCSG* 33 (Turnhout: 1997), 87, 113.

9 Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, 51.

10 Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, 80–81.

11 On Theodore’s *Vitae*, see Dirk Krausmüller, “The *Vitae* B, C and A of Theodore the Stoudite: Their Interrelation, Dates, Authors and Significance for the History of the Stoudios Monastery in the Tenth Century, *Analecta Bollandiana* 131 (2013), 280–298. An English translation by Robert Jordan and Rosemary Morris of *Vita* B by Michael the Monk is forthcoming in the Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library series.

12 *Antirrhētics tres adversus iconomachus*, PG 99: 328–436. English trans. Catharine P. Roth, *St Theodore the Studite: On the Holy Icons* (New York: 1981); Thomas Cattoi, *Theodore the Studite: Writings on Iconoclasm* (New York: 2015), 45–119.

13 Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *St Theodore the Studite’s Defence of the Icons: Theology and Philosophy in Ninth-Century Byzantium* (Oxford: 2018), 23–29.

theological creativity in defending the veneration of icons as a legitimate and traditional practice of the Church.¹⁴ We may also note that Theodore composed a number of poems in refutation of the iconoclasts.¹⁵ However, it was not for these iconophile works that he was generally remembered but for his *Catecheses*.¹⁶

3 Theodore the Stoudite, Three Refutations against the Iconoclasts (*Antirrhethici tres Adversus Iconomachus*)

3.1 *Defining Christ's Icon*

Theodore begins his refutations with a radical statement listing the apophatic attributes of the Godhead as incomprehensible (ἀπερίληπτον), uncircumscribable (ἀπερίγραπτον), infinite (ἄπειρον), undefined (ἄόριστον), and formless (ἄσχημάτιστον). These and other adjectives indicate by abstraction what the Godhead is not. The use of the alpha privative demonstrates that we do not even know the Godhead exists, let alone what kind of thing it is.¹⁷ Its nature is such that it remains beyond all predication, so that when trying to conceptualize it there is no name, no likeness, no circumscription, no definition, nothing at all which falls within the apprehension of the human intellect.¹⁸ Theodore's intention in emphasizing the absolute transcendence of the Godhead is to contrast it to Christ's circumscription in human form, so that he can discuss what is and what is not shown in his icon. In addition, he intends to show how we are to understand the terms θεολογία, which deals with the divine nature of the Trinity, and οἰκονομία, which deals with God's purpose for creation and fallen humanity.¹⁹

14 Ken Parry, "Theodore the Stoudite: The Most 'Original' Iconophile?," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 68 (2018), 261–75. This article is one of a cluster of four on Theodore published in *JÖB* 68, based on a conference held in Vienna in 2016.

15 On Theodore's iconophile poetry, see Olivier Delouis, "Expérience de l'icône et preuve par l'image chez Théodore Stoudite," in S. Brodbeck and A. Poilpré (eds.), *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans l'espace ecclésial: Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, (Byzantina Sorbonensia) 30 (Paris: 2019), 151–70; Kristoffel Demoen, "Monasticism and Iconolatry: Theodore Stoudites," in W. Hörandner, A. Rhoby, and N. Zagklas (eds.), *A Companion to Byzantine Poetry* (Brill: 2019), 166–90.

16 There are two collections of Theodore's *Catecheses*, the so-called *Parva* and *Magna*, see Roman Cholij, *Theodore the Stoudite: The Ordering of Holiness* (Oxford: 2002), 65–73.

17 *Antir.* 1.2, PG 99: 329CD.

18 *Antir.* 1.5, PG 99: 333C. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 1.5, PG 3, 593AD.

19 *Antir.* 2.4, PG 99: 353D.

The iconoclast asks how the two natures in Christ are retained in the icon, if Christ and his image are of different natures. Theodore replies that the case of the icon is different from the union of the two natures in Christ. They cannot be categorized in the same way, for not even the human nature is present in the icon, let alone the divine nature, but only their relationship (πρός τι).²⁰ Divinity cannot be present in the icon through a union of natures, but by a relative participation (σχετική μετέληψις).²¹ He reaffirms this by saying the image of Christ is called "Christ" because of the meaning of the name, not because it has the nature of divinity and humanity.²² When Christ is said to be man and God it is said synonymously, but when it is said of his image it is said homonymously.²³ It is neither the uncircumscribable divinity nor the circumscribable humanity that is seen in Christ's icon, but the hypostasis of the Son of God who took flesh. Theodore underscores the distinction between hypostasis and nature by stating that every icon is a portrait of a hypostasis, not of a nature.²⁴ Although Christ assumed human nature in general,²⁵ he assumed it as seen in an individual and therefore he must have been circumscribed. He was hypostatically distinct from other individuals, otherwise he would not have been seen or recognized.²⁶

A further question centres on how the natural can exist together with the artificial, if Christ is said to exist naturally but his image to exist artificially. For it did not happen that as soon as Christ was seen his painted image came into being.²⁷ The natural prototype and the artificial image are separated by a lapse of time, and since they do not exist together, they do not receive the same veneration. However, for Theodore they have simultaneous existence

20 Ken Parry, "Aristotle and the Icon: The Use of the *Categories* by Byzantine Iconophile Writers," in S. Ebbesen, J. Marenbon, and P. Thom (eds.), *Aristotle's Categories in the Byzantine, Arabic and Latin Traditions* (Copenhagen: 2013), 35–57; Christophe Erismann, "Venerating Likeness: Byzantine Iconophile Thinkers on Aristotelian Relatives and their Simultaneity," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24 (2016), 405–25.

21 *Antir.* 1.12, PG 99, 344BC.

22 *Antir.* 2.17, PG 99, 361B.

23 Aristotle, *Categories*, 1.1–5. See further Christophe Erismann, "The Depicted Man: The Byzantine Afterlife of Aristotle's Logical Doctrine of Homonyms," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 59 (2019), 311–39.

24 *Antir.* 3.1.34, PG 99, 405A.

25 John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: 1983), 151–56.

26 *Antir.* 3.1.21, PG 99, 400D.

27 John Philoponus in the 6th century makes a similar observation using the example of the emperor's image, trans. Michael Share, *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World*, 2.36.4–14 (London: 2005).

because when Christ is seen, his image is seen *in posse*; in other words, his image has potential existence before its iconographic production *in esse*. The mention of a time-lapse before the appearance of Christ's icon is the nearest either side in the debate comes to mentioning the possibility that his image evolved over time. Theodore emphasizes the priority of Christ's image over the textual description of him, despite the lack of a detailed account of his physical appearance in the New Testament. The promotion of miraculous images-not-made-by-hands (ἄχειροποίητα), such as the famous Edessan image, was intended to show that certain images were contemporaneous likenesses of Christ, and therefore not subject to artistic licence.²⁸

3.2 *Prototype and Icon*

Theodore discusses three ways in which the image is related to its prototype: 1) it is related by a "shared name"; 2) by a "shared likeness"; and 3) by a "likeness of hypostasis." It is not possible to distinguish Christ from his image by the name they share but by their natures.²⁹ Given the importance of identifying the icon by its title, as well as by its iconography, there is no discussion about mistaking an icon because the wrong name has been given to it.³⁰ Christ and his image may be different in nature, but they share an identity in the application of the same name.³¹ What is said about the image and the prototype applies to the name only and the identity of veneration, not to an identity of nature or substance. This homonymous relationship means that the two share the same veneration. The material of the icon does not participate in the veneration, although the person depicted appears in it for veneration.³²

In a letter written between 821 and 826 to John the Grammarian, the future iconoclast patriarch John VII (837–843) of Constantinople, Theodore explains the term homonymous in relation to icons.³³ He writes that according to the definition of philosophy things are said to be called "homonymous" if, though they have a common name, the definition of being (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας)

28 See Mark Guscini, *The Image of Edessa* (Leiden: 2009).

29 *Antir.* 1.8, PG 99, 337C.

30 In the *Libri Carolini*, Theodulf of Orléans remarks on the arbitrary nature of the *titulus* on icons, see Thomas F. X. Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009), 204.

31 *Antir.* 1.11, PG 99, 341B.

32 *Antir.* 2.18, PG 99, 364BC.

33 John the Grammarian's knowledge of logic is found in fragments in which he argues that narratives offer better definitions of individuals than images, see Jean Gouillard, "Fragments inédits d'un antirrhétique de Jean le Grammairien," *REB* 24 (1966), 171–81.

corresponding to the name differs for each, as in Christ and his portrait.³⁴ The passage is based on the opening section of Aristotle's *Categories*, with Christ and his portrait substituted for a man and his image. The substitution of the names Peter and Paul in handbooks of logic terminology, dated between the 6th and 8th centuries, provides evidence for the teaching of Aristotelian definitions by Christian tutors.³⁵ Such handbooks would have been known to Theodore and Nikephoros when they were receiving their education, providing them with the grounding required to apply logic terminology to the image question. In fact, the level of higher education attained by them is mentioned in their respective *Lives*, giving rise to a relatively new genre of hagiographical texts in which the educational accomplishments of the saints are emphasized.³⁶ Given the intellectual level of iconophile thought in second iconoclasm, this emphasis was meant to show they were pedagogically equipped to combat the iconoclast policies of the imperial authorities. We may note also Theodor's insistence on the training and discipline required of monks copying manuscripts in the Stoudios scriptorium.³⁷

Theodore writes of the close relation between embodiment and circumscription in Christ's incarnation. The fact of becoming a man and therefore being circumscribed means that Christ establishes the prototype of his own image.³⁸ If what is circumscribed can in principle serve as a prototype for an image, then the fact that Christ was circumscribed means he is depictable.³⁹ For Theodore that which is artificial imitates something which is natural, for nothing may be called artificial unless it is preceded by something natural.⁴⁰

34 *Ep.* 528, Fatouros, II, 790.

35 See Mossman Roueché, "Byzantine Philosophical Texts of the Seventh Century," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 23 (1974), 61–76; idem, "A Middle Byzantine Handbook of Logic Terminology," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 29 (1980), 71–98.

36 For Theodore, *Vita* by Michael the Monk, *PG* 99: 117D–120A, 237AB; see further Oksana Yu. Goncharko and Dmitry N. Goncharko, "A Byzantine Logician's 'Image' within the Second Iconoclastic Controversy: Theodore the Studite," *Scrinium* 15 (2019), 163–77. For Nikephoros, Elizabeth A. Fisher, "Life of Patriarch Nikephoros I of Constantinople," in Alice-Mary Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington DC: 1998), 52–56; on his education in logic see Oksana Yu. Goncharko and Dmitry N. Goncharko, "A Byzantine Logician's 'Image' within the Second Iconoclastic Controversy: Nikephoros of Constantinople," *Scrinium* 13 (2017), 291–308.

37 Ken Parry, "Theodore the Stoudite and the Stoudious Scriptorium in Ninth-Century Byzantium," in Rodney Ast, et al (eds.), *Observing the Scribe at Work: Scribal Practice in the Ancient World*, OLA 301 (Leuven: 2021), 139–53.

38 *Antir.* 2.6, *PG* 99: 356B.

39 *Antir.* 2.9, *PG* 99: 357AB.

40 *Antir.* 3.2.1, *PG* 99: 417A. On this see Parry, "The Most 'Original' Iconophile?," 269.

The natural image has a natural relation (φυσική φυσικῶς), whereas the artificial image has an artificial relation (τεχνητή τεχνητῶς). The natural image is identical both in essence (οὐσία) and in likeness (ὁμοίωσις) with its prototype, while the artificial image is identical with its prototype in likeness but different in essence. Without this essential difference there would be no artificial image of Christ, or of anyone else for that matter.⁴¹

If what is seen in the image refers to the prototype, and if whenever there is a prototype there can be an image, then Christ, since he became a man, has an artificial image. The image refers to him by a relation of likeness. Despite the difference in essence the image of Christ is not divided from its prototype because the veneration offered to the image passes to it.⁴² Theodore then speaks of the “shared likeness” between image and prototype revealed in the portrait.⁴³ This is said to further support the argument that the image and its prototype share the same veneration. For the iconoclast there must be an identity of essence between them, whereas for the iconophile there must be a difference in essence. For Theodore this difference in essence does not mean Christ’s icon receives a lesser veneration than Christ himself.⁴⁴

Coming to the last of Theodore’s three terms, he discusses “likeness of hypostasis.”⁴⁵ The application of the term hypostasis to mean person or individual was well established in Byzantine theology by Theodore’s time. John of Damascus defines hypostasis as person (πρόσωπον) and individual (ἄτομον), suggesting that they mean the same thing.⁴⁶ It refers to a numerical distinct individual, such as Adam or Eve, and the existential reality each signifies. Each person is a hypostasis different from another; the term summarizing what is distinctively individual to each within the same species. It is the hypostatic likeness of the person that is shared by the prototype and the image. As Theodore remarks, universals are seen with the mind and thought, whereas individuals are seen with the eyes that view perceptible things.⁴⁷ For him universals

41 *Antir.* 3.2.2, PG 99: 417B. The essential difference is maintained by Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, 4.3.1, PG 3: 473C, and John of Damascus, *Third Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 16, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 111 (Berlin: 1975), 125.

42 *Antir.* 3.2.4, PG 99, 417D. Cf. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 18.45, PG, 32, 149B-152A.

43 *Antir.* 3.2.5, PG 99, 420A.

44 See below and Dirk Krausmüller, “Adoring the Divine Image of Christ: Some Remarks on the Icon Theology of Leo of Chalcedon and Theodore of Stoudios,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 58 (2018), 423–42.

45 *Antir.* 3.3.1, PG 99, 420D.

46 *Institutio elementaris*, 2, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 1 (Berlin: 1969), 21.

47 *Antir.* 3.1.16, PG 99, 397AB.

have their existence in each identifiable individual, for example, humanity in Peter and Paul and others of the same species. Like Maximus the Confessor, Theodore follows Aristotle in positing that universals are ontologically dependent on particulars.⁴⁸

For Theodore, if individuals (ἑκαστα) did not exist man in general would be eliminated. This means that humanity was not in Christ if it did not subsist in him as in an individual.⁴⁹ When “man” is said it means the common essence, but when “a man” is said it means the hypostasis or individual. Although Christ assumed human nature in general, because he did not have a separate human hypostasis in addition to his divine hypostasis,⁵⁰ yet he assumed it as seen in an individual presence, so the possibility of being circumscribed exists.⁵¹ Although there is a distinction between common names and proper names, a specific individual may be known by both. For example, Paul is called “man” in respect to what he has in common with other men, but in as much as he differs in his hypostasis he is called “Paul.”⁵² This does not mean that a nameless man lacks a hypostasis; the name is important for identifying the individual but other features determine individuality, such as a short nose, curly hair, or brown eyes.⁵³ There is no list of special distinguishing features relating to Christ’s appearance given by iconophiles.⁵⁴

The iconoclast suggests that it is better that Christ should remain imageless in spiritual contemplation rather than venerated in an icon, but Theodore replies that if merely spiritual contemplation (νοερά θεωρία) were sufficient, it would have been enough for Christ to appear in a purely spiritual form.⁵⁵ If he did not come in the body, then we would have been deprived of witnessing his actions and his sufferings.⁵⁶ The topic gives rise to unease in the iconoclast’s

48 Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua to John*, 10. 42, trans. Nicholas Constatas, *On the Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: 2014), 312–15.

49 *Antir.* 3.1.15, PG 99, 396D–397A.

50 Ken Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: 1996), 101–02, 107–108; Tollefsen, *Theodore the Studite’s Defence of the Icons*, 86–97.

51 *Antir.* 3.1.17, PG 99, 397B.

52 *Antir.* 3.1.18, PG 99, 397C.

53 John of Damascus, *Institutio elementaris*, 5, Kotter 1, 22–23.

54 The features are more general than specific in the late 9th-century handbook attributed to Ulpian the Roman, see John Lowden, *Illuminated Prophet Books: A Study of Byzantine Manuscripts of the Major and Minor Prophets* (University Park: 1988), 52. A similar description is found in the 10th-century *Letter of the Three Patriarchs and Related Texts*, eds. Joseph Munitiz et al. (Camberley: 1997), lxvi–lxviii, 30–33.

55 The tradition of imageless prayer in monastic spirituality and the icon cult represent complementary strands within Byzantine thought.

56 *Antir.* 1.7, PG 99, 336D.

mind about depictions of Christ after he rose from the dead. He concedes that Christ may have been circumscribed up to his passion, but not after his resurrection.⁵⁷ To this Theodore answers that he retains the properties of his human nature because he did not become disincarnate as a result of his *anastasis*. But the iconoclast thinks that although he had the properties of a body when he appeared to the apostles after his resurrection, he was in fact without density or circumscription.⁵⁸ This is reminiscent to a degree of some Christian docetic Christologies and perhaps even of the Christology of the Qur'an.⁵⁹

Discussion concerning the terms circumscribed (περιγραπτός) and uncircumscribed (ἀπεριγραπτός) figure prominently in 9th-century iconophile thought due to their importance in understanding the philosophical aspects of portraying Christ in an icon. The terms were introduced into the debate by Constantine V (741–775) in his theological questions (πεύσεις), and subsequently appear in the *Definition* of the Iconoclast Council of 754.⁶⁰ They are integral to the Christological dilemma posed by Constantine V that accuses the painter of Christ's icon of being guilty of either the Monophysite or Nestorian heresy. Given that Christ has a divine as well as a human nature, what exactly can the painter depict in painting his icon? If it is only the divine nature, although it is impossible to represent the divine nature, then the painter stands accused of Monophysitism. If, on the other hand, it is the human hypostasis apart from the hypostasis of the Word then he stands accused of Nestorianism. These two positions are suggested with polemical intent being terms associated with earlier Christological controversies.⁶¹

3.3 Who Can Be Depicted in an Icon?

The terms circumscribed and uncircumscribed also occur in relation to the question of whether angels, being bodiless creatures, can be depicted in images.

57 *Antir.* 2.41, PG 99, 381C.

58 *Antir.* 2.44, PG 99, 384C. See further, Ken Parry, "Providence, Resurrection, and Restoration in Byzantine Thought, Eighth to Ninth Centuries," in Markus Vincent (ed.) *Studia Patristica* 97, vol. 23 (Leuven: 2017), 295–304. Also, Nikephoros below.

59 Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: 2013), 37–39. See Theodore Abū Qurrah below.

60 Torsten Krannich et al., *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754* (Tübingen: 2002), 40. Price translates the two terms as "finite" and "infinite," but I think "circumscribed" and "uncircumscribed" better suit the context of iconoclasm and iconology, see Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, II, 468–471.

61 The iconophiles turn the tables on the iconoclasts accusing them in turn of Monophysitism and Nestorianism, see Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 138–144; Tollefsen, *Theodore the Studite's Defence of the Icons*, 64–67.

Theodore says that we are taught to depict not only what comes into our perception by touch and sight, but also whatever is apprehended in thought by intellectual contemplation (νοερά θεωρία). Only the Godhead is beyond circumscription, for everything else, since it is defined and comprehended by the intellect, can be circumscribed by hearing and sight.⁶² We will return to the topic of depicting angels when we look at Nikephoros.

For Theodore what cannot be circumscribed cannot be depicted. Therefore, for an image to be classified as an icon it must have a prototype, only not just any prototype but one worthy of honour and veneration, which means in effect Christ, the Theotokos, and the saints. However, Theodore sees a danger of idolatry from the icon as well as the idol.⁶³ For use of the term "icon" has been proscribed for the likeness of God according to his infinite nature (κατὰ φύσιν ἄπειρον), so its application is restricted to the bodily form of Christ. Even if it were possible to depict the uncircumscribed nature of the Godhead it would be idolatrous to call such a depiction an icon. An image claiming to represent such a thing would be *ipso facto* an idol.⁶⁴ Only that which can be circumscribed can serve as a prototype for an icon, and then, as we have seen, not just any prototype. Iconophiles impose necessary restrictions on who can be represented in an icon and argue from the doctrine of Christ's incarnation that Christians are justified in painting his icon and venerating it. What is possible for the icon of Christ is by extension possible for those who have attained the glory of sainthood.

By making saintliness the standard by which to judge who is suitable to be shown in an icon, the question of virtue and its embodiment comes into focus. It is at this point that the theology of the icon touches on the moral beauty of the holy person. Aristotle considered moral beauty to be the purpose (τέλος) of virtuous endeavour,⁶⁵ and in Byzantium moral beauty was expressed through the body, especially the face, which was said to become radiant. In defining the classical notion of καλοκάγαθία, the 10th-century *Souda* states; "*kalos* refers to the beauty of the body and *agathos* to that of the soul."⁶⁶ The theological implications of this are clearly apparent in iconophile thought, even if they are not explicitly developed. In a letter written to the future saint, Ioannikos the hermit, Theodore describes seeing him as transfigured like Moses (λαμπρυνθείς

62 *Antir.* 1.10, PG 99: 341A.

63 *Antir.* 1.16, PG 99: 345D-348A; Parry, "The Most 'Original' Iconophile?," 268-271.

64 See Nikephoros below.

65 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.8.1099a13.

66 *Souda* online: <http://www.stoa.org/sol-entries/kappa/251>.

μωσαϊκῶς) at Mount Sinai,⁶⁷ and on another occasion, he speaks of Christ adorning humanity with the archetypal beauty of deification (θεώσεως).⁶⁸ It was by regaining the likeness to God through the practice of virtue that the divine glory inhabited the saint, allowing the beauty of holiness to shine out. Moral beauty was an expression of social and cultural expectations, and in the Byzantine case, the manifestation of the Christian virtues. The virtues equated with holiness were recognized in hagiographical works detailing the moral excellence of the saints and the effect this had on others.⁶⁹

The focus on the holiness of the saint shows that the beauty of the icon is not to be found in the skill of the painter. This does not mean iconophiles lacked an appreciation of artistic talent in rendering the beauty of saintly virtue, but it would be wrong to separate beauty from holiness when they were perceived to be related.⁷⁰ It is clear that the affinity between beauty (καλός) and goodness (ἀγαθός) was an ancient one in Greek thought and had become a hallmark of Byzantine ascetic literature.⁷¹ There was no Byzantine aesthetics as a separate study in the modern sense of the term. If beauty was understood as a divine attribute, then it had ontological meaning beyond mere physical appearance. In Byzantine Christianity the link between physical and moral beauty reached its apotheosis in Christ's Transfiguration on the mountain and subsequently in the transfigured saint.⁷² The Byzantines idealized behaviour that was the embodiment of beauty and goodness no less than their predecessors; it was culturally determined.

On the topic of lifelikeness in icon painting Theodore suggests that the accuracy of the iconographer in capturing the likeness of the subject is of secondary importance.⁷³ It is of interest that Basil the Great compares the task of finding the truth of what happened in the past to painters who make copies from copies; the further removed they are from the original the less their

67 *Ep.* 461.8, ed. Fatouros, II, 657. See Denis F. Sullivan, "Life of St. Ioannikios," in Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, 280–91, 299.

68 *Ep.* 518.44, ed. Fatouros, II, 773.

69 In the *Vita* of Symeon of Lesbos the saint's virtue, despite his unkempt appearance, was recognized by the three-year old Michael III, see Dorothy Abrahamse and Douglas Domingo-Forasté, "Life of Sts. David, Symeon, and George of Lesbos," in Talbot (ed.), *Byzantine Defenders of Images*, 219–220.

70 The beauty of holiness and the ugliness of sin was a Byzantine trope, just as beauty was good and ugliness evil for Neoplatonists, see Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.6.

71 Maximus the Confessor identifies the beautiful with the good, *Fifth Century of Various Texts*, 83, G. E. H. Palmer et al., *The Philokalia*, vol. 2 (London: 1981), 280.

72 Cf. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Transfiguration*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, V (Berlin: 1988), 436–59.

73 Theodore Abū Qurrah makes a similar statement, see below.

copies resemble it.⁷⁴ The artistic merit of the icon lies in its resemblance to the subject only insofar as the subject is worthy of veneration. It is not the artistic qualities of the icon that are honoured but the person portrayed in it. The icon and its prototype receive one and the same veneration irrespective of the painter's skill to reproduce the likeness of the original. Theodore rejects any division between the image and its prototype in terms of veneration. There is not one veneration for the image and another for the prototype, because this would deny the existence of a relationship between them, which was the iconoclast's position.⁷⁵

Talk of abstraction and naturalism in Byzantine icon painting is misleading because our understanding of what these terms signify has no bearing on what the Byzantines themselves thought. It is a matter of perception and expectation.⁷⁶ Our expectations in relation to such ideas are not necessarily compatible with those of the past in terms of language or culture. We need to understand what "lifelikeness" meant to the Byzantines and in what sense it represented idealized beauty. Christ being the image of the Father, and humanity being created in the likeness of God, established an ontological connection with human embodiment expressed in a distinctly appropriate form of iconographic representation. The icon stood as a symbol of divine likeness restored and was understood as such in the Byzantine mind.

3.4 *Unwritten Tradition*

Theodore's iconoclast states that venerating icons is mistaken because there is no written authority for it. This leads the Stoudite to explain that there are non-scriptural teachings handed down and known from the later fathers (πρὸς τῶν Πατέρων ἔστερον). These fathers applied terms, such as the Son being consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father, at a time when it was necessary to refute heretical doctrines. Although the exact words may not be written that Christ is the prototype of his image, the time has now come for this to be said to refute the iconoclasts.⁷⁷ For Theodore technical expressions not found in

74 *Homily on the Martyr Gordius*, quoted by John of Damascus, *First Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 39, Kotter 111, 149–50, trans. Pauline Allen in Johann Leemans, et al., "Let us Die that we May Live": Greek Homilies on Christians Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350–AD 450) (London: 2003), 59.

75 *Antir.* 3.3.5, PG 99: 421CD.

76 For discussion, see Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Images in Byzantium* (Princeton: 1996), 5–47.

77 *Antir.* 2.7, PG 99: 356CD.

scripture belong to the historical advancement of Christian doctrine.⁷⁸ It is the presence of heresy that gives Theodore the authority to use special terms because the exigencies of iconoclasm oblige him to defend the orthodox faith. His approach to biblical exegesis allows him to spell out the meaning of scripture in different words from the original text. This means that whenever Christ is mentioned his potential image is there by implication. Of course, scripture could be made to mean what each party wanted it to mean, so there is an argument on both sides for interpreting it in favour of their respective positions. It is clear, however, that iconophiles believe their approach to scripture has the weight of patristic tradition behind it.

The iconophile promotion of unwritten (ἄγραφος) tradition as a source of authority arose from the iconoclasts' emphasis on written evidence and their literal interpretation of scripture, the latter exemplified by their reading of the Old Testament prohibition of idols. The authority for claiming unwritten tradition came mainly from Basil the Great, whose discussion of certain long-held customs offered patristic testimony.⁷⁹ The assigning of icon veneration to unwritten tradition was a recognition of its ritual context, because it was mainly in relation to customs associated with devotional practices that unwritten authority was invoked. By prioritizing the sense of sight Theodore is led to remark that the disciples first saw and heard Christ before a written account of him was made. From this he concludes that if the iconoclasts want to remove the image of Christ then they must first remove the written word.⁸⁰ However, he does not go so far as to claim that Christianity can exist without the Gospels, even though he gives priority to Christ's image. Christianity was not just a religion about a book, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a religion about a person, so an image could take precedence. Elsewhere he stresses the equivalency of seeing and hearing and of image and word.⁸¹

3.5 *Venerating the Icon*

In seeking to define veneration Theodore distinguishes between different types. He begins with worship or adoration (λατρεία) which is given to God alone, followed by veneration (προσκύνησις) given to rulers, as well as children to parents. We may give honour required by law (νόμος), or out of fear (φόβος), or from desire (πρόθος),⁸² and although veneration appears to take the same

78 Cf. John of Damascus, *Third Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 11, Kotter 111, 122; Parry, "The Most 'Original' Iconophile?," 266–268.

79 *On the Holy Spirit*, 27.66, PG 32: 188A–192B.

80 *Antir.* 3.1.2, PG 99: 392AB.

81 *Antir.* 1.17, PG 99: 348C.

82 *Antir.* 1.19, PG 99: 348D. See Nikephoros below for a similar list.

form (ἰσότυπος), it differs in intention (διανόησις). The outward gesture may look the same, but the inward intention is different. It is important to know this as well as the diversity of veneration (διαφορὰ προσκυνήσεως), so that when we venerate the prototype through the image, we give the appropriate adoration due to God alone. There are suitable kinds of veneration given to others who are depicted in icons, such as the Mother of God and the saints.⁸³ The icon of Christ receives the honour of relative veneration (σχετικὴ προσκυνήσις), while the Theotokos and the saints receive the veneration due to them, according to the differing veneration. Theodore operates with this distinction but does not propose a special veneration due to the Mother of God, as happened in the Latin tradition with *hyperdulia*.⁸⁴ When it comes to venerating icons, it is not so much a matter of degree as of kind; iconophiles insist that λατρεία differs in kind from προσκύνησις.

There is a question concerning Theodore's use of the terms worship and hypostasis in relation to Christ's icon.⁸⁵ We need to keep in mind that the term hypostasis when applied to the Mother of God and the saints is one thing, but quite another when applied to Christ. This is because the term hypostasis when used in conjunction with Christ refers to the divine hypostasis of the Trinity. The hypostasis of the preexistent Christ and the incarnate Christ are one and the same; there are not two hypostases, as this would lead to a fourth person of the Trinity and so-called Nestorianism. So how does this square with the adoration of the hypostasis of Christ and his representation in an icon when the two are separate entities? Theodore has stated that the veneration is not divided between the prototype and its image,⁸⁶ and that Christ himself receives the absolute worship of adoration (λατρευτὴ προσκυνήσις), whereas his icon receives the relative veneration of honour. Thus, it is the hypostasis of Christ, that is the whole person in whom the human and divine are united, that is venerated. This means that as one of the Trinity Christ is worshipped irrespective of whether he is in an icon or not. Further it might imply, as the iconoclasts argue, that an icon of him is unnecessary, but despite this Theodore

83 *Antir.* 1.19, PG 99: 348D. Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, 1, 47–49.

84 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa pars, q. xxv, art. 5. It is of interest that in the section before *hyperdulia* Aquinas states that *latría* is due to the image of Christ. It is worth noting that he shows none of the earlier misgivings of the Carolingians in using the term. See the introduction to the *Opus Caroli* by Ann Freeman, *Theodulf of Orléans: Charlemagne's Spokesman against the Second Council of Nicaea* (Aldershot: 2003), 1, esp. 33–53.

85 Krausmüller, "Adoring the Divine Image of Christ," 432–42; Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, 1, 47–49.

86 *Antir.* 3.3.8, PG 99: 424BC.

argues that it is imperative to have an icon of Christ,⁸⁷ while at the same time not denying worship of Christ in contemplation and prayer.

Theodore's iconoclast proposes that painting is good because it is useful for instruction and recollection, but not for veneration.⁸⁸ He suggests a compromise solution by having icons placed out of reach where they cannot be kissed or touched.⁸⁹ Here the physical gestures associated with venerating icons are seen to contribute to the idolatrous practices of the cult. Theodore draws attention to the inconsistency in such a compromise, because it does not matter whether icons are placed high up or low down; the intention to bow before them is the same. Trying to stop them from being touched or kissed does not prevent them from being honoured in the heart or mind. For the iconoclasts, the lighting of candles and the burning of incense was too close to ancient rituals centred on the divine inhabitation of statues. For them, such practices were another sign of the introduction of pagan worship into the church, but as with the cult of relics, physical contact with the icon was a notable aspect of honouring it.⁹⁰

4 Patriarch Nikephoros (758–828)

Nikephoros' father was a secretary in the imperial chancery who was banished from Constantinople under Constantine V for his support of the iconophiles. He followed his father into the imperial service and it was in this capacity that he attended the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.⁹¹ It was while he was still an imperial employee that he wrote his *Brief History* for which he remained better known.⁹² In 797 he abandoned his bureaucratic career to take up the ascetic life and in doing so founded a monastery of his own. He was subsequently appointed administrator of the capital's main poorhouse and made patriarch in 806 under Emperor Nikephoros I (803–811). Like his predecessor Tarasios and later successor Photios, he was elevated from lay status to patriarch in a matter

87 Ken Parry, "Theodore Studites and the Patriarch Nicephorus on Image-Making as a Christian Imperative," *Byzantion* 69 (1989), 164–83.

88 *Antir.* 2, PG 99: 352C–353B.

89 This was suggested by emperor Leo V, but rejected by Nikephoros, see above, and Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 50.

90 Cf. John of Damascus on the tactile nature of icon veneration, *Second Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 10, Kotter III, 98; Roland Betancourt, "Tempted to Touch: Tactility, Ritual, and Mediation in Byzantine Visuality," *Speculum* 91, 3 (2016), 660–89.

91 Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, I, 155.

92 Cyril Mango, *Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History* (Washington, DC: 1990).

of days. Theodore the Stoudite and his uncle Plato were imprisoned for their opposition to his appointment. However, he did the right thing in Theodore's eyes when he opposed the return to iconoclasm in 815 under Leo V and was deposed as patriarch. He spent his remaining years in exile until his death in 828. Among his theological works the *Three Refutations Against Constantine V* is the most accessible,⁹³ but his writings are important in addition for preserving the *Definition* and florilegium of the Iconoclast Council of 815.⁹⁴

5 Patriarch Nikephoros, *Three Refutations against Constantine V* (*Antirrhethici tres adversus Constantinum Copronymum*)

5.1 *Defining Christ's Icon*

The *First Refutation* of Nikephoros deals with Constantine V's argument that the definition of a true image is that it must be consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with its prototype,⁹⁵ although it is of interest that this argument was not endorsed by the Iconoclast Council of 754.⁹⁶ The emperor not only objects to there being an icon of Christ, but he also objects to the fact that his icon is of a different nature from Christ himself. However, it should not be necessarily to point out that Christ is one thing and the material from which his icon is made is another. To confuse the two by claiming that they must be of the same essence merely confounds the natural order.⁹⁷ The emperor is mistaken in making substance (οὐσία) and art (τέχνη) amount to the same thing, when God is the creator and craftsman of everything which has been brought from nothingness into being. Art imitates nature but is not itself of the same substance. On the contrary, it takes the natural image as a model and fashions from it an object resembling it, which is worthy of comparison, as we may see in many works of art.⁹⁸

Nikephoros continues his criticism of Constantine V by exposing the logical absurdity of his argument. If according to the emperor the image must be consubstantial with its prototype, and if he himself agrees that the image

93 *Antirrhethici tres adversus Constantinum Copronymum*, PG 100: 205–533, French trans. M.-J. Mondzain-Baudinet, *Nicéphore, Discours contre les iconoclastes* (Paris: 1989). This is the abbreviated title, see Alexander, *Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople*, 167–73.

94 Nikephoros, *Refutatio et Eversio*, above. For iconophile florilegia, see A. Alexakis, "Byzantine Florilegia," in Parry (ed.), *Companion to Patristics*, 15–50.

95 Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V*, CSCO 384, Subsidia 52 (Louvain: 1977), 40.

96 However, the argument is refuted at Nicaea II, Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, II, 475.

97 *Antir.* 1.15, PG 100: 225AB.

98 *Antir.* 1.16, PG 100: 225CD.

is circumscribable, then he must admit that the prototype is circumscribable since it is consubstantial with the image. For it is an absolute impossibility for things which are consubstantial to differ from each other in their nature.⁹⁹ In maintaining an essential identity, and thus a lack of distinction between prototype and image, the emperor completely removes any reason for the image to exist. By maintaining such a position, he falsifies the very nature of reality itself.¹⁰⁰

In refuting the emperor's argument regarding the icon painter being able to represent only Christ's human nature, given the divine nature cannot be represented, Nikephoros says that not only is Christ's visible human form seen in the icon, but we are reminded of the likeness of his invisible prototype. The iconographer seeks to unite image and prototype without in any way diminishing or separating the model. The image and its prototype are united through the act of representation, and yet this act does not diminish the prototype because the two remain distinct. On the contrary, the two are brought together and joined in union, but without losing their essential difference while united.¹⁰¹

In posing his iconoclast Christology, Constantine V asks how it is possible to depict Christ if he consists of two natures, one divine and the other human. To this Nikephoros replies that as the two things he is discussing are opposed to each other, he should learn to attribute to each the properties appropriate to each.¹⁰² Although the invisible is opposed to the visible, the intangible to the tangible, the incorruptible to the corruptible, and the impassible to the passible, they can in fact be contemplated in the person of Christ.¹⁰³ The opposing properties of his two natures are united in unconfused union. It was necessary after the union, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, for the uncircumscribed to be circumscribed with the flesh.¹⁰⁴ The fathers have taught that our perfection lies in his divinity as well as in his humanity. They teach that he is of the same essence (ὁμοούσιος) as God the Father according to his divinity, and of our essence according to his humanity. He is circumscribed therefore in respect of his humanity and uncircumscribed in respect of his divinity.¹⁰⁵

99 *Antir.* 1.16, PG 100: 228C.

100 *Antir.* 1.18, PG 100: 229C.

101 *Antir.* 1.23, PG 100: 256A.

102 *Antir.* 1.19, PG 100: 232A.

103 *Antir.* 1.39, PG 100: 300A.

104 *Antir.* 1.26, PG 100: 269D-272B.

105 *Antir.* 1.26, PG 100: 273B.

The question of circumscription (περιγραφή) and its definition in relation to representation (γραφή) is one that Nikephoros returns to several times.¹⁰⁶ He states that representation causes the visible and bodily shape of what is being represented to be present, while circumscription, which has nothing to do with this, limits what it contains by the three determinants of time (χρόνος), place (τόπος) and apprehension (κατάληψις). Since representation is related by resemblance to the prototype, it can be said to be the representation of the prototype, but being separate from the model, the representation has its own existence in its own temporality. Circumscription, on the other hand, is concerned with neither resemblance nor difference. It is not the making of a visible form, nor is it circumscription of a prototype; it exists by itself, its existence being the very existence of what it contains. For circumscription of a person is always by the three determinants already mentioned, which for Nikephoros are essentially divinely gifted principles of creation.¹⁰⁷

The painter does not circumscribe Christ in making an icon of him because his art does not bring into being persons who exist as independent entities. This would be to put the painter at the same level as God the creator. Perhaps Nikephoros is thinking here of certain icons that appear so lifelike that they were believed to speak and perform miracles. Such icons had a special place in the repertoire of Byzantine images, ranging from the icon of the Virgin painted by St Luke to icons that shed blood or took revenge on blasphemers. Wonderworking and animated images gave rise to stories and legends regarding them, with at least one image claiming that Christ himself breathed life into his icon.¹⁰⁸ In his treatise on the holy images, Theodore Abū Qurrah mentions the tradition (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet Mohammad that condemns those who create images of living things because they think they can act like God. This tradition proclaims that on the day of judgement artists will be required to breathe life into their images, only being unable to do so they will be condemned.¹⁰⁹

In arguing for the full humanity of Christ, Nikephoros states that the property of being rational belongs to a man, and that without it he would not be a man.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, if his mortality, his erect posture, his moving, his being

106 Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 110–112.

107 *Antir.* 2.13, PG 100: 357BD.

108 Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania: 2010), 179–80.

109 See Theodore Abū Qurrah below.

110 The Neoplatonist Porphyry in his *Isagoge*, 3, defines man as a mortal rational animal; see John of Damascus, *On Definition, Dialectica*, 8, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 1 (Berlin: 1969), 69–72.

animate, or any of the other properties which when combined constitute the nature and definition of man, are missing, he would not be a man. If someone takes away the ability to neigh from a horse, or that of barking from a dog, there will be neither horse nor dog. Therefore, the humanity of Christ if deprived of one of its properties is a defective nature and Christ is not a perfect man. In fact, he is not Christ at all, but is lost altogether if he cannot be circumscribed and iconographically represented.¹¹¹ It must be said that Nikephoros' comparison of a horse and dog in relation to Christ's perfect manhood is less than satisfactory. A horse would still be a horse without its neigh and a dog would still be a dog without its bark. The loss of an individual property makes the animal defective but no less recognizable as a horse or dog. By the time of iconoclasm, Byzantine theology had concluded that although Christ advances in age and wisdom (Luke 2:52), his humanity was in fact the restored perfection of Adam before the fall.¹¹² Nevertheless, the hypostatic union is such that every aspect of our fallen nature, such as hunger, thirst and fatigue, is experienced by him, except for sin.¹¹³ The patriarch emphasizes on another occasion that because Christ was fully human, he was therefore subject to human passions and feelings, and that being so, he can be depicted in an icon.¹¹⁴

5.2 *Prototype and Icon*

In distinguishing the image from its prototype, Nikephoros remarks that there are basically three types of images: 1) There are natural images, that is images which express the form of the prototype but differ from it according to subject, although not according to substance. An example might be that of a son, who being the natural image of his father differs from him according to subject, but not according to substance; 2) There are mimetic images, such as images which express the form of the prototype but differ in their substance. For example, the image of an emperor on his coin differs in substance from the emperor himself, although they share the same name, and both are referred to as emperor. This is Aristotle's definition of a homonym;¹¹⁵ 3) There are symbolic images, that is images which imitate a prototype but differ in substances and in subject or name. An example might be an image of a lamb or a symbol

111 *Antir.* 1.20, PG 100: 244CD.

112 Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 156–59.

113 Cf. John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei*, 3. 20, ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, II (Berlin: 1973), 162–63.

114 *Antir.* 2.17, PG 100: 368AB.

115 Aristotle, *Categories*, 1a.

of the cross understood as a representation of Christ.¹¹⁶ However, no matter how many types of images there are, an image always differs in some respect from its prototype, otherwise it would not be an image.¹¹⁷

In adopting the Aristotelian concept of relation (*πρός τι*), Nikephoros says that the image is related to the prototype like the effect is to its cause. According to Aristotle, relatives are said to be what they are from their being of another thing, and by their relation they are said to be related by reciprocity.¹¹⁸ Just as a father is said to be the father of a son, so in turn the son is said to be the son of a father. Therefore, a prototype is called the prototype of an image, and an image the image of a prototype. Both are introduced together and contemplated together, but if the prototype should disappear, the relation does not disappear along with it.¹¹⁹ The relation is maintained irrespective of the loss because of Aristotle's statement that relatives seem to be simultaneous by nature.¹²⁰ For it can happen, says Nikephoros, that relations survive and remain although deprived of their object. The image shows, by means of similarity, resemblance, and form, the prototype as if it were present, and preserves the relation as time passes. Likeness is an intermediate relation which mediates between extremes, in this case between the person portrayed and the portrait, uniting and connecting them through the form, even though they differ in nature.¹²¹

However, although the portrait and the person portrayed are different objects according to their natures, they are not different subjects. For knowledge of the prototype is obtained through the image, and in it the hypostasis of the person represented can be seen. We do not observe this relationship in other types of relatives, for example, in a father and a son. For here we see the opposite case, each of these is not a different kind of object, since they participate in the same essence (that of humanity), but in a different subject and a different hypostasis. So, if the relation does not perish in the case of the father and son, although they are separated, it will be preserved even more in the case

116 Nikephoros discusses canon 82 of the Quinisext Council of 692, *Antir.* 3.30, PG 100: 421A. Although the canon legislates replacing the symbol of the lamb with the image of Christ it was not the end of such symbols in Byzantine art.

117 *Antir.* 1.28, PG 100: 277A.

118 *Categories*, 6.b28. Parry, "Aristotle and the Icon," 49–50; Erismann, "Venerating Likeness," 2–13.

119 *Antir.* 1.30, PG 100: 277CD.

120 *Categories*, 7.b15.

121 *Antir.* 1.30, PG 100: 280A.

of the icon. In addition, likeness confers homonymy, as the name is the same for both, for even the image of the emperor is called “emperor.”¹²²

Nikephoros argues this to illustrate the character of the image and its relationship to the prototype. It does not have identity of essence, nor can we in every respect predicate what is predicated of the prototype also of the image derived from it. One happens to be animate, the other inanimate, one happens to be endowed with reason and movement, the other is without reason and movement, so that the two are not identical. On the other hand, they resemble each other in form, while on the other they differ in essence. As much as the image is understood to be relative, it is honoured together with the prototype, and conversely it is dishonoured together with it.¹²³ In defining an image, then, it is necessary to take these points into consideration.¹²⁴

5.3 *Idol and Icon*

Like Theodore the Stoudite, Nikephoros makes it clear that an image cannot be an icon unless it has a prototype, therefore it must be a likeness or image of something that has being and existence.¹²⁵ An idol by contrast is a phantasm of the imagination because it is a representation of something that has no foundation in creation. Idols are images of such things as tritons, centaurs and other works of the pagan mind which have no existing counterpart. For this reason, an icon and an idol must be distinguished from one another. It is those who fail to see a distinction between them who deserve to be called idolaters. Idols cannot be spoken of in terms of icons, given that the term “idol” is reserved for the pagan cult which if offered to demons in the form of sacrifices.¹²⁶ An icon, on the other hand, is related to its prototype and is the effect of a cause.¹²⁷

The link between imaginative beings and idols is discussed by John of Damascus who writes of two kinds of conceptual thinking (ἐπίνοια). The second of these is concerned with imagining things that do not exist from things that do. He has in mind fantastic creatures such as centaurs, sirens and

122 *Antir.* 1.30, PG 100: 280AB. On Nikephoros’ knowledge of the *Apocriticus* by the 4th-century author Marcarius (Magnes), who discusses homonymy and relatives, see Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, “Opening scenes of the Second Iconoclasm: Nicephorus’s *Critique* of the citations from Macarius Magnes,” *REB* 60 (2002), 65–111.

123 Cf. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 18.45, PG 32: 149B–152A.

124 *Antir.* 1.30, PG 100: 280BC.

125 *Antir.* 1.28, PG 100: 277A. On icon versus idol in Theodore the Stoudite, see Parry, “The Most ‘Original’ Iconophile?,” 268–271.

126 *Antir.* 1.29, PG 100: 277B.

127 *Antir.* 1.30, PG 100: 277C.

tragelaphs. These imaginings give form to things that have no reality, and when these are given material shape, they become in effect idols.¹²⁸ The last of these, the tragelaph or goat-stag, was used by Aristotle to illustrate the philosophical idea that a thing may be conceived even though it does not exist.¹²⁹ If an idol is defined as lacking a prototype, then it is further distinguished from an icon by being a fictitious invention. We can see that this idea was familiar to St. Paul from his remark "An idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4), as well as to Origen who distinguishes a likeness from an idol.¹³⁰

5.4 *Icons of Angels*

The question of depicting angels in icons took the controversy into an ill-defined area of theological debate. This is apparent when Nikephoros says that Constantine V is right to some extent to say that angels are uncircumscribable, only they are not entirely uncircumscribable. He then suggests they are circumscribable according to the three determinants mentioned above: 1) They are circumscribable by *time*, for they have a beginning and whatever has a beginning is not completely free of circumscription. This means that as created beings they are brought into existence and circumscribed by their creator; 2) They are circumscribable by *place*, but as this is an intellectual place (τόπος νοητός), they are not subject to corporeal or physical restraints; 3) They are circumscribable by *apprehension*, because as intellectual beings they share in one another's thoughts and therefore know to some degree their nature. Not being of the body, they are neither of bodily shape nor of bodily weight.¹³¹ They can however manifest themselves in human form and have appeared as such to those worthy of seeing them.¹³²

It is of interest that Nikephoros' three determinants of angelic corporeality are found in John of Damascus' *Expositio Fidei* or *Precise Edition of the Orthodox Faith*. There John states that to be circumscribed means to be determined by time, place, and apprehension, while to be contained by none of them is to be uncircumscribed.¹³³ It is not known if Nikephoros had access to John's text but, based on our present knowledge of the reception of John's

128 John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, 65, Kotter I, 135.

129 Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 1.16a.18.

130 Origen, *Homily on Exodus*, 8.3, see Ken Parry, "Image-Making," in John Anthony McGuckin (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (Louisville: 2004), 128–31.

131 *Antir.* 2.7, PG 100: 345CD.

132 *Antir.* 2.9, PG 100: 349C. On angels in Theodore the Stoudite, see Parry, "The Most 'Original Iconophile?," 271–74.

133 *Expositio fidei*, 1.13, Kotter II, 39.

writings in Byzantium, it appears unlikely,¹³⁴ which means the patriarch must have used another source. The passage in which John states these determinants, however, might be a later interpolation and so may have been the text known to Nikephoros. On angels specifically, John says that their manifestation in perceptible form is on a continuum relative to our corporeality, meaning they are opaque the nearer they are to us and ethereal the nearer they are to God. Angels by nature do not have bodily shape and are not extended in three-dimensional space, but although they are spiritual beings and move from place to place, they cannot be in two places at once. Only God is everywhere at once (ἀόριστος).¹³⁵

5.5 *Cross and Eucharist*

Because the cross and the Eucharist were acceptable images for the iconoclasts, Nikephoros refutes their use of the term “image” in relation to them. He provides ten syllogistic proofs in arguing for the priority of Christ’s icon over the cross and in doing so suggests that the icon is worthy of greater honour than the symbol of the cross or crucifix:

- 1) The icon of Christ resembles him more clearly and is a better means of understanding his nature than the cross. The cross is not a likeness of Christ’s body, whereas the icon, being closer to the prototype, is worthy of greater honour.
- 2) When we look at the cross we are first absorbed by its shape and only later consider what it represents.¹³⁶ The icon on the other hand is worthy of more honour because the impression it conveys is more direct.
- 3) Although Christ’s body sanctified the cross at the crucifixion, he also sanctified us by his death. Therefore, his body and its image are worthy of greater honour than the cross.
- 4) Although the cruciform shape of Christ’s body on the cross has a symbolic meaning, we attach greater importance to his body than to the shape. In looking at the shape of the cross our attention is distracted from the true

134 On the Damascene’s *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, see Vassilis Adrahtas, “John of Damascus,” in Parry (ed.), *Companion to Patristics*, 264–77.

135 *Expositio fidei*, 2.3, Kotter II, 46–47.

136 Leontinus of Neapolis in the 7th century remarks that once the arms of a cross are broken it is thrown away, Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, I, 292. The question of not venerating a broken cross is raised in the Slavonic *Vita* of Constantine the Philosopher, during his purported meeting with the iconoclast John the Grammarian, see *Life of Constantine the Philosopher* 5, trans. Marvin Kantor, *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes* (Ann Arbor: 1983), 33–35. This is Constantine-Cyril known with his brother Methodius as “Apostles to the Slavs.”

meaning of the crucifixion. The body is the thing itself (οὐσία), whereas the shape is incidental (συμβεβηκός).

- 5) The cross being a symbol does not convey the true meaning of Christ's passion. The true impression of the passion is to be found in the more vivid depiction of him in icons. Thus, they are worthy of greater honour than the cross.
- 6) The cross is a symbol of Christ's passion and suffering, whereas his icon represents the whole of him and not simply a part. Therefore, the icon is worthy of greater honour than a symbol.
- 7) The icon is homonymous with the name of Christ, whereas the cross is not. We can refer to the icon by the name of its prototype, therefore the icon deserves more honour for sharing in more of Christ.
- 8) The body of Christ preceded his passion, therefore the icon is more important than the cross. The type of the cross came into being because of the passion, so it must follow that Christ's body is more honourable than the cross.
- 9) The cross exists only seen through its relationship to the body of Christ. Thus, the type of the cross is inferior to the icon because it is at one remove, and if we respect the cross we should respect the icon even more.
- 10) Icons depict the crucifixion in full detail of which the cross is only a part. Those who venerate the cross must therefore venerate the icon of which the cross is a part, or they make a nonsense of their faith.¹³⁷

In refuting Constantine V's doctrine that the only true image of Christ is the Eucharist, because it is of the same essence (ὁμοούσιος) with its prototype, Nikephoros points out that such a doctrine obliges the emperor to accept a theory of circumscription. For, if he contends that the sacrament is of the same substance as the body of Christ, because the Lord said (Matt. 26:26) "This is my body" (τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου), then Christ must be circumscribed. If then the sacrament is circumscribed and becomes the body of Christ, then the body of Christ must be circumscribed. The emperor cannot talk of the Eucharist as the body of Christ without involving himself in a contradiction. In fact, he commits a further contradiction by maintaining that the Eucharist is a "type" (τύπος), while at the same time saying it is truly the body of Christ.¹³⁸ There are no two ways about it, the Eucharist is either the actual body of Christ or it is not.

¹³⁷ *Antir.* 3.35, PG 100: 428C-433C. Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 187-188; Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: 2002), 98-101.

¹³⁸ *Antir.* 2.2, PG 100: 333BD.

For Nikephoros, Constantine v's doctrine of the Eucharist as a "type" commits him to a non-realist eucharistic theology and a denial of the real presence of Christ in the bread and the wine. The change of the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ was accomplished by means of the *anamnesis* and *epiclesis* in the Byzantine eucharistic liturgy.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Constantine v's claim that the Eucharist may be understood as an image of Christ's body is false,¹⁴⁰ because we do not say the bread and the wine are an "image" or a "type" of his body, rather they are the deified body of Christ. What Christ said to his disciples was "Take, eat (this is) my body," not "(this is) the image of my body." For the bread and the wine, which are eaten and drunk, are changed into the body and blood of Christ naturally, and do not become a body different from the former. There is no division between the bread and wine and the body and blood because they are one and the same body of Christ. Nikephoros concedes that one may call the elements "antitypes" (ἀντίτυπα) before the prayer of consecration but not after it. He is aware that there is patristic authority for use of this term in a eucharistic context.¹⁴¹

5.6 *Icons of the Resurrection*

It is apparent from what Nikephoros says that some iconoclasts challenged the representation of Christ in his post-resurrection state.¹⁴² They argued that because his body became incorruptible when he rose from the dead, he must therefore have been unrestrained by the limits of circumscription, with the result that it is impossible to depict him. At least that is how they interpret what the Gospels claim concerning Christ's appearance to his disciples after his resurrection. He must have been uncircumscribed because he appeared to them through closed doors and without encountering any obstacle (Jhn. 20:26). But for Nikephoros, the fact that he conversed with them, and that Thomas touched his side, is evidence of his tangibility and circumscription, even though his body was of a divine form (θεοειδέστατον), it was nevertheless a body.¹⁴³ Christ was not subsumed into the divine essence (οὐσία θεότητος) following his resurrection. The iconoclasts interpret the phrase "Even though we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16), to mean he is now without shape or form. For Nikephoros, however,

139 For Germanos' "realist" view of the divine liturgy, see Robert Taft, "The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm," *DOP* (1980–1981), 34–35, 45–75.

140 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V*, 45–47.

141 *Antir.* 2,3, PG 100: 336AD.

142 Parry, "Providence, Resurrection, and Restoration," 301.

143 *Antir.* 3,38, PG 100: 437B.

the deification of the flesh of Christ does not mean that he became disincarnate, but on the contrary, he retains his body in his resurrected state and sits on the right hand of the Father.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, even with an incorruptible body, the risen Christ can be shown in an icon.

5.7 *Venerating the Icon*

Nikephoros distinguishes different types of veneration (προσκύνησις) using similar terms to Theodore, which suggests a well-established taxonomy.¹⁴⁵ There is veneration which is due to God considered as worship or adoration (λατρεία), followed by four types of veneration or honour (τιμητική). 1) There is honour which is given by law (νόμος) to those in a higher position to us, such as emperors and other rulers. 2) There is honour which we are compelled to give in fear (φόβος) of a tyrant. 3) There is honour which we give by desire (πόθος) and faith in the saints and through them to God. It is this honour which is given to the angels, holy persons, churches, and sacred vessels. 4) There is honour which is relative (σχετική) and given in greeting and which we give to others out of friendship and love.¹⁴⁶ In addition, law, fear and desire are characteristics of that divine worship which is reserved for God alone.¹⁴⁷ When it comes to icons, they are worthy of veneration because they perpetuate the memory of those they represent, and the veneration given to them is that of honour, not that of worship.¹⁴⁸ Accordingly, the honour passes to the prototype, so that in not accepting that icons participate in their prototypes by means of the honour they receive, the iconoclasts destroy all notion of worship and veneration.¹⁴⁹

6 The Situation in Syria-Palestine

It was the Melkites of Syria-Palestine, with their Byzantine iconophile heritage, who were potentially vulnerable on the issue of venerating icons.¹⁵⁰ The

144 *Antir.* 3.39, PG 100: 444CD. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 30.14, PG 36: 121C-124A.

145 See also John of Damascus, *Third Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 27-40, Kotter III, 135-141.

146 *Antir.* 3.10, PG 100: 392AC.

147 Theodore lists the same three, as above, while John of Damascus mentions fear, desire, and honour, *Third Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 40, Kotter III, 141.

148 *Antir.* 3.10, PG 100: 392C.

149 *Antir.* 3.20, PG 100: 405CD.

150 Ken Parry, "Byzantine and Melkite Iconophiles under Iconoclasm," in Charalambos Dendrinos et al. (eds.), *Porphyrogenita: Essays in the History and Literature of Byzantium and the Latin East in Honour of Julian Chrysostomides* (Aldershot: 2003), 137-51; Juan

8th century had seen the foundations laid for the Chalcedonian theology of the icon, most notably by John of Damascus, making it a *sine qua non* of the Byzantine tradition. Yet this should not be taken to mean that other Christians, such as the Syrian Orthodox and the Church of the East,¹⁵¹ were iconophobic. When it came to images, the Christological differences between Eastern Christians had no bearing on their attitude to them, despite arguments devised to suggest otherwise. The arguments put forward by Byzantine iconophiles to show that Christology was definitive in the debate over icons were essentially polemical strikes at opponents from the wrong side of the Chalcedonian divide. The intra-communal rivalry in Syria-Palestine under early Islam was no less intense than it had been in previous times, in fact it was exacerbated by the 'Abbāsid's policy of divide and rule among the Christian communities. Furthermore, Christians were under increasing pressure from Muslim and Jewish critics for their practice of displaying and venerating icons.¹⁵²

Whenever iconophiles were accused of idolatry they had recourse to an interpretation of the Exodus prohibition of idols that made it non-binding on Christians. The Melkite Theodore Abū Qurrah was no exception. However, like his fellow Constantinopolitan iconophiles, he was unaware of the programme of wall paintings in the synagogue at Dura Europos on the Euphrates, a city destroyed by the Sasanians in 256, because it was not discovered till the early 20th century.¹⁵³ Even if he had known of it, as well as the synagogues in Palestine with mosaic pavements defaced in the 8th century,¹⁵⁴ it would have made little difference. John of Damascus thought the Manicheans must be iconophobic because their theological dualism meant that they despised matter, when they were in fact known for their image-making.¹⁵⁵ Such accusations were entirely polemical point-scoring. This needs to be borne in mind when

Signes Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period," *DOP* 67 (2013), 135–87.

151 The polemical terms Monophysite and Nestorian have been replaced in ecumenical dialogue by Miaphysite and Church of the East.

152 On the edict of caliph Yazīd II, see Christian Sahner, "The First Iconoclasm in Islam: A New History of the Edict of Yazīd II (AH 104/AD 723)," *Der Islam* 94 (2017), 5–56.

153 See Jennifer Chi and Sebastian Heath (eds.), *Edge of Empires: Pagans, Jews, and Christian at Roman Dura Europos* (New York: 2011).

154 Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Towards a New Jewish Archaeology* (rev. ed., Cambridge: 2010), ch. 7.

155 *Second Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 13, Kotter III, 104. Mani's *Ārdhang* or "Book of Pictures" is commented on as early as Ephrem the Syrian, see C. W. Mitchell, *Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*, vol. 1 (London: 1912), 5th Discourse, xciii. The *Ārdhang* is not referred to in the *Contra Manichaeos* attributed to John of Damascus.

iconophiles accuse non-Christians of idolatry or iconoclasm; rhetorical antithesis was more important than accurate assessment.

Equally it was difficult for Chalcedonian iconophiles to admit that non-Chalcedonians could justify their use of images. In view of Byzantine emperors and patriarchs becoming iconoclasts, it was not enough to show allegiance to the Council of Chalcedon to establish the orthodoxy of painting icons and venerating them. This was largely because of the Christological blame game played by both sides in the controversy. The result was that in the process of refuting their fellow Chalcedonian iconoclasts, Byzantine iconophiles turned icon veneration into an exclusive Chalcedonian preserve. As far as they were concerned, because the Christologies of non-Chalcedonians were heretical, their claims to paint and venerate icons were invalid.¹⁵⁶ However, as we shall see, Theodore Abū Qurrah's focus in his *Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons* is mainly on Jews and Muslims rather than non-Chalcedonians. It of interest to ask whether those fellow Melkites of his who rejected icon veneration (see below), knew of the defacement of mosaics in Chalcedonian churches in Syria-Palestine in the 8th century.¹⁵⁷ From our perspective we can see that all the religious traditions of Theodore's time, including early Islam, were not averse to images of some kind.¹⁵⁸ It is apparent that there was a broad speculum of iconic and aniconic images in use across the religious divisions of late antiquity and the early medieval period.

7 Theodore Abū Qurrah (ca. 755–ca. 830)

Theodore's dates are unfortunately unknown and not much is certain about the events of his life.¹⁵⁹ He appears to have come from the city of Edessa and to have been, at least for a time, bishop of Ḥarrān. He is remembered for being one

¹⁵⁶ On Chalcedonians accusing non-Chalcedonians of iconoclasm, see Ken Parry, "The Doves of Antioch: Severus, Chalcedonians, Monothelites, and Iconoclasm," in J. D'Alton and Y. Youssef (eds.), *Severus of Antioch: His Life and Times* (Leiden: 2016), 138–59. On the Church of the East, see Ken Parry, "Images in the Church of the East: The Textual and Art Historical Evidence in the Light of Contemporary Practice," in Samuel Lieu and Glen Thompson (eds.), *The Church of the East in Central Asia and China* (Turnhout: 2020), 189–214.

¹⁵⁷ See Daniel Reynolds, "Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm," *DOP* 71 (2017), 1–62.

¹⁵⁸ Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (rev. ed., New Haven: 1987).

¹⁵⁹ John C. Lamoureaux, "The Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah Revisited," *DOP* 56 (2002), 25–40; Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abu Qurrah's Theology in its Islamic Context* (Berlin, 2016).

of the first Christian theologians to write in Arabic, although works attributed to him survive in Greek and Syriac as well. He was active in the first quarter of the ninth century during which he gained a reputation as a polemist, a *mutakallim*, on behalf of the patriarchate of Jerusalem. It seems uncertain that he was a monk of Mar Sabas Monastery and the influence of John of Damascus has perhaps been overstated. It is evident that there are problems in the transmission of his *Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*.¹⁶⁰ The fact that icons are hardly mentioned in other writings attributed to him should give us pause for thought. Also, it should be noted that the Second Council at Nicaea in 787 had virtually no impact on the Melkites, because they continued to celebrate only Six Ecumenical Councils in their liturgy.¹⁶¹ The acceptance of Nicaea II as ecumenical was urged upon the Eastern patriarchs by Photios in his Encyclical of 866.¹⁶² We need to keep these matters in mind when assessing what impact his *Treatise* may have had on Melkite concerns over icon veneration.

8 Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Treatise on the Veneration of Icons* (*Maymar fī Ikrām al-Aiqūnāt*)¹⁶³

8.1 *Enemies of the Icons*

If the main concern of John of Damascus in Syria-Palestine in the early 8th century was to refute the Byzantine iconoclasts, the situation was different for Theodore Abū Qurrah in the early 9th century. It is apparent from his *Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons* that Theodore needed to address a range of iconophobic mindsets in addition to those stemming from his own Melkite Christian community. The most obvious of these belonged to Jews and Muslims.¹⁶⁴ The issue was not so central to other Christian communities in the 'Abbāsid Caliphate because their churches were untainted by Byzantine iconoclasm. It has been suggested that these other communities were indifferent to the question of images, but this was not the case.¹⁶⁵ Certainly being outside

160 Signes Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship," 163–73.

161 Nicaea II is not mentioned in the 10th-century compilation known as *The Letter of the Three [Melkite] Patriarchs to the Emperor Theophilos*, see n. 54 above.

162 *Encyclica ad sedes orientales*, eds. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: 1983), 39–53.

163 Arabic text, Ignace Dick, *Théodore Abuqūrra, Traité du culte des icônes* (Rome: 1986). My thanks to Najib George Awad for his help with the transliterations.

164 It is noticeable that Theodore is less direct in his criticism of Muslims than of Jews.

165 See, for example, Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton: 1995), 219.

the Byzantine empire was less a problem for them than for the Melkites, who were viewed as having divided loyalties by the Muslim authorities. At the time Theodore was writing his *Treatise*, iconoclasm was back on the political and theological agenda in Constantinople.

From the start of his *Treatise* Theodore makes it clear who he is refuting when he refers to “outsiders” (*al-barrāniyyīn*) and those who have “a scripture sent down by God” (Surah 6: *al-Baqarah*, 214; Surah 48; *al-Imran*, 4-10), but he also refers to those who concede to the criticism of these “outsiders” and refrain from venerating icons.¹⁶⁶ In other words, those Christians who under the sway of Muslim and Jewish influence question the practice and disown it. His concern as a bishop was for those in his own church who were led to question the practice of venerating icons. But with his polemic aimed at Jews and Muslims, Theodore needs to demonstrate familiarity with their respective attitudes to religious images in defending the Christian practice of prostrating before icons.

Theodore discusses the icon of the crucifixion and those outsiders who mock Christians for displaying icons of their saviour “shamefully crucified.”¹⁶⁷ The reproach of Christians for worshipping their god who died on a cross was made early in pagan anti-Christian polemic, and subsequently became a mainstay of Jewish and Muslim criticism.¹⁶⁸ Theodore illustrates the discussion with a story of a king of great beauty who went in disguise to see how his subjects would treat him when not dressed in his royal regalia. The result was that his enemies taunted and abused him, while others, who stood by him in his humiliation and disgrace, were rewarded. For Christians, when an icon of the crucifixion is installed in a church, and it is mocked by those who say they should be ashamed to see their God depicted in such a way, they gladly rejoice and share in his humiliation knowing the reward that will come to them. What

166 Griffith, ch. I, references are to Sidney H. Griffith's translation of the text, *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons Written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān (c.755–c.830 A.D.)* (Louvain: 1997). The term “outsider” was used earlier by Christians for pagans and now for those of a different monotheism.

167 Griffith, ch. xxiv. This expression is found in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 89, PG 6: 688C–689A. Theodore, in his *Against the Jews*, suggests it was because of the crucifixion that the Gentiles followed Christ, John C. Lamoreaux *Theodore Abū Qurrah* (Provo, UT: 2005), 27–39. See John of Damascus on venerating the icon of the crucifixion, *Expositio fidei*, 4.16, Kotter II, 207, and Nikephoros above.

168 John of Damascus, *Heresies* 100, *On the Ishmaelites*, ed. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* IV (Berlin: 1981), 61, knows Surah 73: *al-Nisa*, 156–159, in which it is said that Christ only appeared to be crucified.

appears to outsiders to be the worst kind of degradation is for Christians a token of the truth of their faith.

8.2 *Idolatry*

It is not surprising that the Jewish prohibition against worshipping idols (Exod. 20:2-5) is foremost in Theodore's mind. The prohibition that applied to the Jews was not binding on Christians, however, because the apostles granted permission for icons to be installed in churches. Although the claim for apostolic approval of icon veneration is unsustainable, we should see it as part of a broader argument and appeal to unwritten tradition. The Christians have nothing to fear from their acts of prostration (*sujūd*) before icons, unlike the Israelites before idols. Theodore does not elaborate on the distinction between an icon (*ayqūnah*) and an idol (*aṣnām/wathān*),¹⁶⁹ but says that Christians were given the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable them to correctly discern the meaning of the prohibition. God concealed and made secret the real reason till the coming of the Christians.¹⁷⁰ It is Christians who have the key to unlock the inner meaning of scripture. They can discern God's intention and purpose in outlawing idolatry, but with Christ the situation regarding prostrating before his icon is different.

Theodore appeals to the ubiquity of icons in churches throughout Christendom, but it is not clear if his appeal overlaps denominational boundaries, or whether he means only Chalcedonian churches. It is noticeable in his *Treatise* that Theodore as a Melkite does not, unlike his contemporary Byzantine iconophiles in Constantinople, accuse Monophysites and Nestorians of being iconoclasts because of their Christologies. On other occasions, however, he does engage in polemics with these communities.¹⁷¹ He addresses those who object to the practice of venerating icons because there is no written authority for it, in either the Old or New Testament. He is adamant that if they reject this practice then they must reject the eucharistic anaphora, baptism, chrismation, the consecration of churches, the sounding of the *semantron*,¹⁷² the veneration of the cross, and other established Christian practices. The veneration of images has been handed down from the beginning and to disown it means rejecting other customs taken for granted.¹⁷³ Theodore appeals to unwritten tradition, but not to the same extent as John of Damascus and

169 Parry, *Depicting the Word*, ch. 5.

170 Griffith, ch. xviii.

171 See the section "Discerning the True Church," in Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 61–151.

172 Wooden gong struck for the monastic hours.

173 Griffith, ch. vii.

Constantinopolitan iconophiles. For him and the others, however, the practice is apostolic and patristic.¹⁷⁴

We have cited already the Muslim *ḥadīth* that those who make portraits of living beings will be required on judgement day to breathe life into them.¹⁷⁵ In reference to this tradition Theodore suggests that those who make pictures of plants and trees should be required to do the same thing, as it contradicts the Muslim dislike of depicting living things.¹⁷⁶ We may recall the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem and in the Umayyad mosque at Damascus, from the late 7th and early 8th centuries, which depict plants and trees.¹⁷⁷ Theodore does not mention the Dome of the Rock or the Al-Aqsa Mosque traditionally associated with the Night Journey (Surah 17; *al-Isra*, 1) and Ascension to Heaven of the prophet Muhammad. Nor does he mention the veneration of the Ka'ba at Mecca, unlike John of Damascus and the Patriarch Germanos before him,¹⁷⁸ which may be indicative of his situation in the 'Abbāsid Caliphate. He does say, however, that if Jews had access to the rock, which they claim is from the Garden of Eden, they would kiss and anoint it, although it is not referred to by any of their prophets.¹⁷⁹ According to Jewish tradition Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:2), where Abraham is said to have bound his son Isaac with the intention to sacrifice him (*Aqedah*), was identified with the Temple Mount.¹⁸⁰ Theodore reminds the Jews that they were enjoined to direct their prayers (*qiblah*) to the East (Gen. 2:8) as the Christians do.

8.3 *Prostration and Intention*

Theodore brings up the question of the intention of the person performing a prostration, either before an icon in a church or on a prayer carpet in a mosque; both require worshippers to direct their thoughts and honour to God. It is important to understand what the worshipper has in mind or intends when making a prostration before the icon.¹⁸¹ It is to Christ and the saints that

174 Although Theodore does not provide a patristic florilegium in the manner of John.

175 Theodore the Stoudite, above. See Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: 1999), 108–110.

176 Griffith, ch. x.

177 See Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, MA: 2006).

178 John of Damascus, *Heresies* 100, *On the Ishmaelites*, Kotter IV, 64; Germanos, *Letter to Thomas of Klaudiopolis*, Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, 1, 342.

179 Griffith, ch. xvii.

180 John of Damascus, *Heresies* 100, *On the Ishmaelites*, Kotter IV, 64, takes issue with some Muslims who claim the place was the Ka'ba at Mecca.

181 Theodore does not distinguish modes of veneration in the manner of Theodore the Stoudite and the Patriarch Nikephoros, or John of Damascus, *Third Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 27–40, Kotter III, 135–141. The Syrian Orthodox Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) does,

the obeisance is made, not to the icon itself. Theodore mentions the gesture of touching the icon as part of the act of prostration, citing Jacob touching the staff of Joseph in the act of prostrating on it (Gen. 47:31).¹⁸² In making prostrations to icons we are making prostrations to the saints themselves, just as the names of the prophets in writing are honoured. It is the gestures we make in front of icons that establishes contact with the saint represented in it.¹⁸³

Theodore continues the topic of prostration by discussing the respect we pay to each other because we are made in the image of God.¹⁸⁴ He illustrates this biblical phrase (Gen. 1:22) by relating a story about a beautiful princess whose image was defaced and transformed into the ugliest of things. The same may happen to a wax image when it is turned into the likeness of something else.¹⁸⁵ The point is that due to our free will we can change to become an image of God or of Satan or a beast. However, we do not make prostrations to those who resemble Satan or a beast; it is not the same as prostrating to the saints in their icons. Theodore emphasizes that not everyone is worthy of prostration, but only those who have been renewed in the image and likeness of their creator.¹⁸⁶ This is based on the patristic teaching that we are restored to the likeness of God through virtue and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Just as we prostrate before the bones of the saints because they have become vessels of the Holy Spirit, so we prostrate before their icons for the same reason. It is the prostrations we make before their icons that rouses the saints to intercede on our behalf to ensure our prayers and petitions are heard.¹⁸⁷

8.4 *Prototype and Image*

Theodore discusses the objection that icons have no contact with those they represent, because being divorced from one another in time and place they have no relationship worthy of respect.¹⁸⁸ This raises the question of the relation of image to prototype, and whether divided by nature there can be any connection between them. In contrast to Byzantine iconophiles, Theodore

however; see Michael Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland, CA: 2015), 167.

182 Griffith, ch. x1.

183 Griffith, ch. x111.

184 Griffith, ch. xx1.

185 This probably refers to an encaustic image.

186 On the limitations on who can be shown in an icon, see Germanos, *Letter to Thomas of Klaudiopolis*, Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, 1, 351.

187 Griffith, ch. xiv.

188 Griffith, ch. x11.

does not discuss the term hypostasis in relation to the image and its prototype,¹⁸⁹ nor does he speak of the homonymous relationship between them. However, like them he does distinguish between adoration (*ʿibādah*) and the honour (*takrīm*) given to the saints in their icons. The name and the icon have equivalency in that they indicate one and the same person, although there is no identity of substance between them. Written names are themselves types of representations, but the icon is better than writing in this respect because it does not require us to be literate. In other words, when it comes to pedagogical instruction the icon is more immediate and reliable than writing.¹⁹⁰ Anastasius of Sinai in the 7th century proposed a similar argument on the basis that texts may be interpolated, whereas material representations (πραγματικά παραστάσεις) may be less susceptible to tampering.¹⁹¹

An interesting observation made by Theodore concerns the icon of the Apostle Paul. Among the Greek fragments attributed to him is a *Debate with a Jew* in which Theodore considers the question of misrepresentation in the icon. He writes that we can discuss who Paul was and what sort of person he was by pointing to his icon and talking about his achievements, but such discussion concerns Paul personally, not necessarily his icon. This is because the painter may not have accurately portrayed Paul according to his actual likeness and true demeanour. It would be wrong to attribute these inaccuracies to Paul himself, but rather they should be confined to the painted icon.¹⁹² The point being made is that we should not automatically assume the icon is a true likeness of its prototype, or that its failure in this regard dishonours the attainments of the saint portrayed. The icon is a product of artistic endeavour and is of necessity entirely different from the person whose representation it is.

We have seen Theodore the Stoudite make a similar point when it comes to the accuracy of the painter in depicting the saint in the icon; it does not hinge on an exact resemblance of the person but on their worthiness to be depicted.¹⁹³ The saintliness of the person determines their inclusion in the iconographic programme, and they receive the veneration due to them, irrespective of the iconographer's ability to portray them. It comes down to the

189 Elsewhere he uses either the Syriac word "*uqnūm*" (person) written in Arabic letters, or the Arabic word "*wajh*" (face) in his *maymars*, see Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms*, 212–234.

190 Griffith, ch. xii.

191 Anastasius of Sinai, *Hodegos*, 12, ed. Karl-Heinz Uthemann, *CCSG* 8 (Turnhout: 1981), discussed by Anna Kartsonis, *Anastasis: The Making of an Image* (Princeton: 1986), 40–67.

192 Lamoureux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 241.

193 Theodore the Stoudite, above.

subject portrayed *not* how well they are portrayed. This might suggest that anyone can paint an icon and that artistic skill is unimportant, but that would be to deny the purpose of the iconographic tradition to evoke the presence of the saints through familiarity with their features. Such a position would indirectly allow for changes in style evident in the long history of Byzantine iconography.

8.5 *Defacement and Consecration*

Theodore remarks that once an icon is defaced it is burned for firewood, suggesting that unless the image remains intact it is unworthy of veneration.¹⁹⁴ Two points arise from this. The first concerns the deliberate defacement of icons by those objecting to them, while the second concerns the non-intrinsic value of the material of the icon. This suggests that if the portrait in the icon is defaced, then it is simply another piece of wood like any other.¹⁹⁵ Both John of Damascus and Leontius of Neapolis in the 7th century recommend that a damaged icon should be destroyed.¹⁹⁶ It is not the material of the icon that makes it sacred, but the person depicted in it, so damaging the icon invalidates the relationship with the saint whose image it is. We recognize the saints in their icons through familiarity with their features as well as by the names inscribed on them. Iconophiles saw no necessity to bless or sanctify icons when those represented in them were themselves holy. There were in fact no prayers for consecrating icons in the 8th and 9th centuries as the iconoclasts at their Council of 754 were ready to point out.¹⁹⁷ The introduction of prayers for consecrating icons came later and did not originate in the Byzantine tradition.¹⁹⁸

Theodore's contention that the status of the material is changed because of having an icon impressed on it, is reminiscent of John of Damascus' theology of matter and its veneration.¹⁹⁹ The Torah and the Gospels are written on sheets of parchment, but before God's words are inscribed upon them they are without honour.²⁰⁰ It is the result of receiving the word of God that they are dignified and given honour, so that no one should dishonour or defile them. It is through the act of painting the icon and copying the scriptures that the materials become worthy of respect. The holiness of the person depicted as

194 Griffith, chap. VIII.

195 On the destruction of broken crosses, see n. 135 above.

196 Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 182.

197 Nicaea II dealt with this issue in its Sixth Session, Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, II, 480–481.

198 Sebastian Brock, "Prayer to Consecrate/Sanctify Icons and Depictions," *The Harp* 8–9 (1995–1996), 86–94.

199 Parry, *Depicting the Word*, 72–75.

200 Griffith, ch. XXII.

well as the divine words of scripture turn the wood and the parchment into revered objects. Thus, writing and painting may be said to be instrumental in sanctifying matter and granting word and image the same status as far as holiness is concerned.²⁰¹

John of Damascus thinks that to some degree the materials participate in the sanctity of those we see in icons.²⁰² But can we say the same about other objects such as crosses and eucharistic vessels? The notion that these things by their association in sacred rites acquire a patina of sanctity is perhaps indicated by the reluctance of Byzantine iconoclasts to desecrate vessels with engraved images, presumably because they were thought to be neutral in some way.²⁰³ In the cult of relics believers gain grace from seeing or touching them, because the bones of the saints are thought to retain the divine grace bestowed upon them in their lifetime. However, there is a distinction between primary and secondary relics; the first preserves once living body parts and the second items associated with the saint. The icon is a secondary relic in the sense that it was never physically a part of the saint shown in it. How far touching and kissing the icon was believed to transfer the grace of the saint depicted in it to the worshipper remains a matter of faith.²⁰⁴

Theodore refutes the suggestion that Christ does not receive the joy of being honoured or dishonoured through his icon in the same way that an image of a mother or father does. It is at this point that he mentions the famous Edessan icon of Christ not-made-by-hands, which he calls "our city," and which is honoured with prostrations.²⁰⁵ He hypothesizes that if someone spits in the face of a portrait of a person's father they would not unnaturally be angry and seek recompense. The point is that if one gets angry over such an incident, think of the joy Christ receives at the honour paid to his icon. He gives another example of a painter who paints a picture of the king's mother engaged in intimate relations with a tramp. If the painter pleaded that he did nothing wrong to the king's mother, but only painted a picture of her, the king would castigate him for his arrogance in painting such a thing. Behind this notion of honouring or

201 On the denial of images as holy in the *Libri Carolini*, see Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 204.

202 *First Oration Against the Iconoclasts*, 36, Kotter III, 148.

203 Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, II, 523–524.

204 See, however, Gregory of Nyssa's *Homily on Theodore the Recruit*, in which he describes the tactile nature of the martyr's painted image as well as his bodily relics, trans. Johann Leemans, in "Let us Die that we May Live," 85.

205 Griffith, ch. xxiii.

dishonouring the person depicted in the image lies Basil the Great's dictum that the honour (or dishonour) shown to the image passes to the prototype.²⁰⁶

9 Conclusion

We can say in conclusion that Theodore Abū Qurrah tackles the question of venerating icons from a different perspective from his counterparts in Constantinople. This is largely because his target audience is Jews and Muslims, as well as those in his Melkite community sceptical of the practice. With Theodore the Stoudite and the Patriarch Nikephoros, on the other hand, their refutations are focused on the ruling regime of Byzantine iconoclasts and the need to retrieve Chalcedonian orthodoxy from heresy. Although the situations in *dār al-Islām* and Byzantium were different, we can see similarities in aspects of iconophile thought that cross the political and geographical boundaries. In the case of Theodore Abū Qurrah these similarities may owe something to John of Damascus' theology of venerating icons, but whether Theodore knew John's work firsthand remains an open question. Perhaps it is worth pointing out that like the Damascene Theodore does not resort to logic terminology in defending the cult of icons, although both are credited with works dealing with Aristotelian logic.²⁰⁷

In the case of Byzantine iconophiles of second iconoclasm, John was known largely by reputation, with his works not being available in Constantinople until later.²⁰⁸ For them the Second Council of Nicaea of 787 offered foundational support, but they are largely silent when it comes to citing its proceedings as an authoritative source. As mentioned above, it was not until the time of the patriarch Photios in 866 that the council was given official recognition as "ecumenical," and yet the Melkites continued to affirm only six councils. Whatever the case regarding knowledge of John of Damascus in Constantinople and Syria-Palestine, iconophiles of the early 9th century came to the rescue of icon veneration believing they had the guarantee of tradition and practice behind them. For Theodore the Stoudite and the Patriarch Nikephoros, the degree

206 *On the Holy Spirit* 18.45, PG 32: 149B-152A.

207 Ken Parry, "Eastern Christianity and Late Ancient Philosophy: A Conspectus," in Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides and Ken Parry (eds.), *Eastern Christianity and Late Antique Philosophy* (Leiden: 2020), 13-51, esp. 35-38.

208 Being anathematized four times by the Iconoclast Council of 754, his name and honour were restored at Nicaea II, Price, *Acts of the Second Council*, II, 541-542. A proper study of John's *Nachleben* in Byzantium and the Christian East is a desideratum.

of technical terminology observable in their arguments made them formidable opponents, notwithstanding the difficulties and curtailments they faced under Iconoclast emperors. All told the 9th century was witness to a theology of images that clarified the Eastern Orthodox response to a crisis that could only be rectified in the end from within the imperial and ecclesiastical establishment.

The Problem of the Holy: Iconoclasm, Saints, Relics and Monks

Dirk Krausmüller

In several Byzantine sources iconoclasts are portrayed not only as destroyers of religious images but also as opponents of the cult of the saints and their relics and of the monastic life. Yet it has long been recognized that this blanket accusation cannot be taken at face value.

During the Second Iconoclasm the reality was quite otherwise. Ihor Shevchenko and Marie-France Auzépy have made a good case that the *Life* of Bishop George of Amastris, authored by the temporary iconoclast Ignatius the Deacon, was written in that period.¹ Yet the text ends with an invocation of the saint.² François Halkin identified the cleric Theodore, who had the Latin *Passio* of Anastasia the Widow translated into Greek, with the prominent iconoclast Theodore Krithinos, which would date the text to the 820s.³ If this hypothesis is correct the cult site of the martyr where incubation was practiced may well have been established in Constantinople before 843.⁴ Only one text suggests that the role of saints as intercessors might have been questioned. In the 10th-century historiographical work known as Theophanes Continuatus it is claimed that Michael II allowed the production of icons but demanded that the names of the depicted not be accompanied by the epithet “saint.”⁵ Yet this may well be an iconophile exaggeration. The veneration of the saints’ remains also appeared to have had official approval. As Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon have pointed out, Emperor Leo V made a present of relics to the church of

1 Ihor Shevchenko, “Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period,” in Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (eds.), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham: 1977), 113–31; and Marie-France Auzépy, “L’analyse littéraire et l’historien: L’exemple des vies de saints iconoclastes,” *Byzantinoslavica* 53 (1992), 57–67, esp. 59–61.

2 Vasilij G. Vasil’evskij, *Russko-vizantijskie issledovanija*, vol. 2 (St Petersburg: 1893), 70.

3 François Halkin, *Légendes grecques de “martyres romaines”* (Subsidia hagiographia) 55 (Brussels: 1973), 86, 131, note 3.

4 Lennart Rydén, “A Note on some References to the Church of St. Anastasia in Constantinople in the 10th Century,” *Byzantion* 44 (1947), 198–201.

5 Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the reign of Constantine V, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources*, CSCO, 384, Subsidia 52 (Leuven: 1977), 147, note 21.

Venice.⁶ In the case of monasticism the evidence is more plentiful. We know that after 815 some monastic communities devoted themselves to the defence of icon worship. Theodore, the abbot of Stoudios, did not even waver when he was exiled.⁷ Theodore's letters show that other abbots took a similar stance. Yet they also reveal that several monasteries maintained communion with the patriarch because they feared punishment, or oscillated between resistance and obedience.⁸ This may give the impression as if monks became iconoclasts only under duress. This is, however, unlikely to be the case. We know that the iconoclast Patriarch John the Grammarian (837–843) had previously been abbot of the Constantinopolitan monastery of Sergius and Bacchus.⁹ This suggests strongly that there existed other communities, which rejected image worship. There is only one source, which mentions an anti-monastic policy during Second Iconoclasm. In the *Life* of Athanasia of Aegina we are told about an imperial command that forced virgins and widows into marriage rather than letting them become nuns.¹⁰ However, there is no independent evidence that would allow us to verify this allegation, and it is most likely baseless.

When we turn to the First Iconoclasm the picture is less clear. The scarcity of source material makes it impossible to establish the attitude of Leo III. The reign of his son Constantine V is somewhat better documented. In later texts Constantine is portrayed as the most evil iconoclast. It is he who is most often accused of being an enemy of the saints, their relics and monasticism. Yet there is evidence that seems to suggest that these claims are unfounded. The Council of Hieria, which had been convened by Constantine, affirms the cult of the saints and their relics, and the claims that several leading Constantinopolitan monasteries were closed are manifestly untrue. Therefore it has recently been argued that the descriptions of Constantine's measures are exaggerations or even outright fabrications by iconophiles who wished to heap opprobrium on their *bête noire*. Yet this does not necessarily mean that older scholarship, which sought to show that Constantine indeed pursued the policies that were ascribed to him, is superseded. In the following three sections the available sources will be reassessed in order to come to a more considered conclusion.

6 Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850* (Cambridge: 2011), 38–40.

7 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 381–382.

8 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 376.

9 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 377.

10 Lee F. Sherry, "Life of St. Athanasia of Aegina," in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: 1996), 139.

1 Saints

In several Byzantine texts it is claimed that Constantine v rejected the belief that the saints intercede with God on behalf of the living and outlawed the custom of addressing prayers to saints during church services. Unfortunately, it is not at all easy to assess the truthfulness of these claims. Therefore it is not surprising that widely differing interpretations have been proposed. In general, scholars have tended to become ever more critical.

This trend can be seen very clearly in the assessment of Constantine's attitude towards Mary. According to Theophanes the Confessor, the emperor suggested to the patriarch that Mary should be called "Christ-bearer" instead of "God-bearer."¹¹ When in 1929 Georg Ostrogorsky wrote his *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* he took it for granted that such a conversation had taken place.¹² In 1977 this naïve approach to the sources was criticized by Stephen Gero. Gero pointed out that Constantine could not have held such a view because the term "Christ-bearer" had been coined by the heretic Nestorius and had repeatedly been condemned by Church councils.¹³ In order to reconstruct what really happened he drew attention to two further texts, the *Chronicle* of George the Monk and the *Life* of Nicetas of Medikion. These texts contain passages, which present Constantine as an enemy of the Virgin. The wording is identical, apart from one detail. George contended that the emperor called the Virgin "Mary because he did not want to call her God-bearer" whereas Nicetas' hagiographer claimed that he called her just "God-bearer because he did not want to call her holy."¹⁴ Gero argued that the *Life* preserved the original version, which George then changed so as to be able to brand the emperor a Nestorian. Therefore, he concluded that Constantine refused to accord Mary the title "holy" or "saint." In 1995 Marie-France Auzépy in turn challenged Gero's interpretation. She claimed that even the version in the *Life* did not reflect historical reality because in Constantine's *Peuseis* and in the *Acts* of the Council of Hieria Mary is routinely given the epithets "holy" and

11 *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern history AD 284–813*, trans. Cyril Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford: 1997), 607.

12 Georg Ostrogorsky, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Bilderstreites* (Breslau: 1929), 32.

13 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 145–146.

14 Theosterictus, *Vita S. Nicetae abbatis Medicii, Acta Sanctorum Aprilis* 1, Appendix (Antwerp: 1675; repr. Brussels: 1968), ch. 28, xxiv (my translation); Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon*, ed. Carolus de Boor, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: 1978), 751 (my translation).

“all-holy.”¹⁵ In 2011 Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon accepted this argument. Yet they offered a somewhat different explanation. Whereas Auzépy had concluded that the evidence was completely fabricated, they were of the opinion that Constantine’s motives were merely misrepresented. Taking up a suggestion made by Ilse Rochow, they argued that the emperor forbade the inflationary use of invocations of Mary.¹⁶ Even so, they considered this policy to be of so little significance that they relegated the discussion to a footnote.¹⁷ Thus it seems that the matter has been settled once and for all. Indeed, there is now widespread agreement that Constantine was a ‘normal’ Byzantine Christian who held Mary in high regard. This consensus, however, rests on shaky foundations. Gero had been well aware of the fact that Mary is called “holy” or “all-holy” in the *Peuseis* and in the *Acts* of the Council of Hieria. Yet he had argued that Constantine’s views had become more radical in the latter part of his reign.¹⁸ Since it cannot be ruled out *a priori* that the emperor changed his mind Auzépy’s argument loses much of its cogency.

In order to establish which of these interpretations is correct it is necessary to have a fresh look at the available evidence. Sources dating to the First Iconoclasm are very scarce. Thus, it is not surprising that there is only one text, which contains information about the cult of the saints. It is a short iconophile pamphlet, which was one of the sources of the treatise *Against Constantine the Horseman*. There we find a creedal statement, which summarizes the iconophile position. As one might expect one section is devoted to the veneration of images. Yet before this section, and separated from it through a reference to the veneration of relics, we find a passage that focuses on the cult of the God-bearer, of John the Baptist and of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs. This passage ends with the words: “I venerate and adore all saints and ask for their intercession and supplication, because we are all saved through their intercessions.”¹⁹

15 See Marie-France Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclisme byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 5 (Aldershot: 1999), 250–51. See also Marie-France Auzépy, “L’Adversus Constantinum Caballinum et Jean de Jérusalem,” *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995), 323–38.

16 See Ilse Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin V. (741–775): Materialien zu seinem Leben und Nachleben* (Frankfurt and Vienna: 1994), 71.

17 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 238, note 342.

18 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 145, n. 20.

19 *Against Constantine the Horseman*, PG 95: 309–344, esp. 312CD. The original version, which in the manuscripts is falsely attributed to Patriarch Methodius, can be found in Dmitry Afinogenov, *Konstantinopol'skij patriarhat i ikonoborcheskij krizis v Vizantii, 784–847* [The Constantinopolitan patriarchate and the iconoclastic crisis in Byzantium] (Moscow: 1997), 182–188, esp. 182–183.

Significantly, a very similar creed is found in the *Acts* of the Council of Nicaea. Here, too, brief exposés of Trinitarian theology and Christology are immediately followed by an affirmation of the intercessory powers of the saints. Veneration of relics and images is mentioned only at the end.²⁰ This creed was read out by an iconoclast bishop who wished to be reconciled with the church. This suggests strongly that the iconophiles suspected their enemies of rejecting the intercession of the saints. Whether the iconoclasts themselves held such a view is less clear. Auzépy claimed that the iconophiles simply assumed that whoever rejected images of saints must also reject the cult of the saints.²¹ This interpretation was accepted by Mike Humphreys who pointed out that John of Damascus created such a nexus in his treatises *On Images*.²² There it is claimed that those who forbid the production of images of saints “do not prohibit the image, but rather the honour due to the saints.”²³ This is certainly an attractive hypothesis. Yet it is hardly conclusive proof. Thus, there remains the possibility that Constantine was indeed opposed to intercessory prayers.

The impasse can only be overcome through analysis of later texts. The best starting-point is the treatise *Against Constantine the Horseman* since it contains the fullest account of Constantine's alleged activities.²⁴ The author starts by complaining that the emperor forbade people to use the attribute “holy” or “saint” when they referred to a church, demanding that they say “I go to Mary's” or “I go to Stephen's” rather than “I go to all-holy Mary's” and “I go to St Stephen's.” That this prohibition was not limited to the names of churches becomes clear in the following sentence. There we are told that the emperor “took (the attribute) “saint” away from the saints and named the all-holy God-bearer ‘God-bearer,’ [claiming] that she cannot help after death.” In the printed text the word “God-bearer” appears only once, which makes the statement unintelligible. Paul Speck had therefore suggested that it should read “named the all-holy God-bearer ‘Christ-bearer.’”²⁵ Yet Alexander

20 *Concilium Universale Nicaenum Secundum. Concilii Actiones I-III*, ed. Erich Lamberg, ACO 11.3.1 (Berlin and New York: 2008), 54, 56.

21 Auzépy, *Hagiographie*, 253.

22 Mike Humphreys, “Images of Authority? Imperial Patronage of Icons from Justinian II to Leo III,” in *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict, and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, eds. Philip Booth, Matthew Dal Santo, and Peter Sarris (Leiden and Boston: 2011), 150–168, esp. 153.

23 John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, trans. Andrew Louth (Crestwood, NY: 2003), 32.

24 *Against Constantine*, ch. 21, 337C.

25 Paul Speck, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Einfluß des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus*, (Poikila Byzantina) 20 (Bonn: 1990), 169.

Alexakis, who is preparing an edition of the text, has been able to establish that the missing word is a second “God-bearer.”²⁶ This is further evidence that Constantine’s supposed Nestorianism belongs to the realm of legend and that originally it was only claimed that the emperor refused to accord the saints a special status within the community of Christians. The second half of the sentence then establishes a close nexus between the rejection of the title “saint” and the rejection of intercession. This casts doubt on Brubaker’s and Haldon’s hypothesis that Constantine merely wished to prevent overuse of invocations of saints. The next statement is even more explicit. Constantine is said to have claimed that “the holy apostles and all the blessed martyrs do not possess the power to intercede and have only helped themselves through the sufferings that they endured and have saved their own souls from punishment” and that they therefore cannot help those who call on them.²⁷ This statement can no longer be explained away as a misunderstanding. It reflects a coherent worldview, which posits that nothing comes between God and the individual human being and that Christians must attain salvation through their own efforts. It is evident that this is one possible interpretation of the Christian faith. As Gero has pointed out, similar statements are found in Protestant texts of the 16th century.²⁸ It seems unlikely that an Iconophile who took the mediating role of saints for granted would have fabricated such a complex argument. Significantly, the author of the treatise *Against Constantine the Horseman* felt the need to defend the mechanisms of intercession. He declared that even in this life people turn to the mothers of those from whom they want a favour because they know that good sons listen to their mothers and concludes that this was even more the case with Mary and her son Christ.²⁹ This is quite an elaborate response. That the author took the trouble to formulate it makes it even more probable that he reacted to a real challenge.

Even this argument, however, may not persuade those who think that the entire debate is fabricated. Therefore, it is essential to establish the date of the relevant sources. Several scholars have undertaken this task. Auzépy suggested that the treatise *Against Constantine the Horseman* predates the Council of Nicaea because the author once implies that the veneration of images is optional whereas the council made it compulsory.³⁰ Unfortunately, we cannot be sure that the treatise is a unitary text. Even Auzépy concedes that some

26 Alexander Alexakis, oral communication (1 February 2018).

27 *Against Constantine*, ch. 21, 312CD (my translation).

28 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 148.

29 *Against Constantine*, ch. 21, 340A.

30 Auzépy, “L’Adversus Constantinum,” 335–336.

parts read as if they had been written much later. Speck who had made the same observation dated the final redaction of the treatise to the years after the Triumph of Orthodoxy.³¹ Therefore, it is possible that the account of Constantine's opposition to the cult of the saints was added to the text only at this latest stage.³² Yet this does not mean that it was invented at that time because its constituent parts can be found in earlier texts. The claim that Constantine changed the names of churches also appears in the *Life* of Stephen the Younger, which dates to the years 807–9, and in the *Life* of Nicetas of Medikion, which was written shortly after 824.³³ Moreover, the former of these texts mentions that the emperor removed the epithet “holy” from the saints, whereas the latter declares that he did not “name” Mary’s intercessions but “said that she cannot help anybody.”³⁴ In this case we find a further, even closer parallel in the *Chronicle* of George the Monk, which dates to the year 846/47.³⁵ There we read: “Mary should not be asked for intercession because she cannot help anybody, nor again should she be named God-bearer.”³⁶ This sentence is virtually identical with the statement in the treatise *Against Constantine the Horseman*, apart from the slanderous modification that I have mentioned earlier. Auzépy argued that these later texts depend on the treatise.³⁷ Yet, as Speck has pointed out, the syntax in the treatise is rather awkward. Thus, it is more likely that all four texts draw on a now lost common source, which Speck dubbed an “anti-Iconoclast pamphlet.” Speck concluded that this source must have been written before 807–9 when the *Life* of Stephen the Younger was composed.³⁸ More recently, Dmitry Afinogenov has proposed an even earlier date for the common source. He has made a good case that the pamphlet,

31 Speck, *Ich bin's nicht*, 438.

32 According to Alexander Alexakis, there exists also an intermediate version, which already contains the information about Constantine's attack on the saints. This text is likely to have been written before Second Iconoclasm. Once it has been published, we will have a clearer idea about the dating. See Alexander Alexakis, *Codex parisinus graecus 115 and its Archetype* (Washington, DC: 1996), 110–116.

33 For the dates see Marie-France Auzépy, *Vie d'Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 3 (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: 1997), 5–6; Jan Olof Rosenqvist, “A Philological Adventure: Editing the Life of St. Niketas of Medikion,” *Acta Byzantina Fennica*, n.s. 1 (2002), 59–72, esp. 61.

34 *Life of Stephen the Younger*, ch. 44, ed. Auzépy, 144–145; *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, ch. 28, xxiv.

35 See Dmitry Afinogenov, “The Date of Georgios Monachos Reconsidered,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 92 (1999), 437–447.

36 George the Monk, *Chronicle*, 751.

37 Auzépy, “L'Adversus Constantinum,” 336.

38 Speck, *Ich bin's nicht*, 174–175.

which he called "Historia Leonis," was composed during the twelve years that separated the Council of Nicaea from Constantine's death.³⁹ If Afinogenov's hypothesis is correct, it distinctly limits the degree of possible fabrication. But even if the pamphlet dated to the 790s, people above the age of fifty would still have had a first-hand experience of what had happened during Constantine's reign.⁴⁰

It is in this light that we must assess claims that Constantine interfered with the cult of the saints. Theophanes the Confessor declares that the emperor moved against all-night vigils in honour of Mary.⁴¹ Patriarch Nicephorus adds that he not only rejected Mary's role as intercessor but also "adulterated and counterfeited all the hymns which invoke her name and which the supplicants address to the one who is born from her in litanies and entreaties" and that he raged "against the sacred memoranda of the saints."⁴² This suggests that Constantine excised calls for intercession from liturgical poetry and from saints' lives. Confirmation for this interpretation comes from the hagiographer of Nicetas of Medikion who claims to have seen sermons written by the emperor "which had no intercession."⁴³ That the emperor wrote such texts shows clearly that he was not an "enemy of the saints," despite iconophile claims that he slandered the Virgin. It is certain that he held them in high regard, but as models for imitation and not as powerful mediators between the ordinary faithful and God. Such an understanding of the role of the saints would be in keeping with the "ethical theory" of images, which we know the iconoclasts to have promoted.⁴⁴

At this point we need to ask: what was the historical context for Constantine's measures? Two texts offer concrete information, the *Chronicle* of George the Monk and Theophanes' *Chronographia*. George informs us that the emperor "promulgated a universal decree for the people, that none of the servants of the Lord should be called holy ... and that one should not ask for their intercession, for they have no power."⁴⁵ Theophanes is even more precise. In the

39 Dmitry Afinogenov, "A lost 8th-Century Pamphlet against Leo III and Constantine V?" *Eranos* 100 (2002), 1–17.

40 Gilbert Dagron speaks of "sources relativement anciennes et crédibles." See Gilbert Dagron, "L'ombre d'un doute: L'hagiographie en question, VIe-XIe siècle," *DOP* 46 (1992), 59–68, esp. 65.

41 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 610.

42 Patriarch Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus*, II.4, PG 100: 330–374, esp. 341A–C (my translation).

43 *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, ch. 28, xxiv.

44 See Milton Anastos, "The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts of 754 and 815," *DOP* 8 (1954), 151–60.

45 George the Monk, *Chronicle*, 751.

entry for the year 765/66 we read that Constantine “displayed a madness much worse than that of the Arabs to the orthodox bishops and monks and laymen, governors and subjects, under his rule, everywhere rejecting in writing as being unprofitable and unscriptural the intercessions of the holy Virgin, the Mother of God, and of all the saints.”⁴⁶ Theophanes attributes to the emperor a specific line of reasoning, that a practice is invalid if it is not mentioned in the Bible. Accordingly, Constantine would have reasoned that there were no Scriptural proof texts for the intercession of the saints and that it must therefore be rejected. As is well known, the iconoclasts employed the same strategy in their polemic against religious images.⁴⁷ If the passage under discussion had no basis in reality it is difficult to see why Theophanes would attribute such a potentially troublesome argument to the emperor. Another significant feature of the passage is Theophanes’ statement that the emperor made his views known to the *orthodox* bishops under his rule. Coming from the mouth of an iconophile author this statement is decidedly odd because in the 760s the Byzantine episcopate was staunchly iconoclast. The most straightforward explanation would be that it was adapted from the title of Constantine’s mis-sive, which would originally have been addressed “to the orthodox bishops and monks and laymen, governors and subjects, under my rule,” in keeping with established practice.⁴⁸

It needs to be said, however, that Auzépy, Brubaker and Haldon would dismiss all these arguments.⁴⁹ They argue that Constantine could not possibly have taken such a step because the Council of Hieria had anathematized anyone who did not accept the traditional role of Mary and the saints within the Christian belief system and did “not ask for their prayers as having the freedom to intercede on behalf of the world according to the tradition of the church.”⁵⁰ At first sight it does indeed seem impossible that the emperor would have gone against the decisions of a church council, which he himself had convened.⁵¹ Yet

46 Translation of Mango, Scott, and Greatrex, *Chronicle*, 607, with slight modifications. See Dirk Krausmüller, “Contextualizing Constantine V’s radical religious policies: The debate about the intercession of the saints and the ‘sleep of the soul’ in the Chalcedonian and Nestorian churches,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 39 (2015), 25–49, esp. 29.

47 See Marie-France Auzépy, “La tradition comme arme du pouvoir,” in *L’autorité du passé dans les sociétés médiévales*, ed. J.-M. Sansterre (Rome: 2004), 79–92, esp. 88.

48 See Krausmüller, “Contextualizing,” 29–30.

49 See Auzépy, *Hagiographie*, 250–251; and Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 39, and 238, n. 342.

50 See *Anathema* 17, ed. and trans. Torsten Krannich et al., *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiëreia 754: Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar ihres Horos* (Tübingen: 2002), 64–65.

51 This is also the opinion of Rochow, *Kaiser Konstantin*, 70–72; and Paul Magdalino, “L’église de Phare et les reliques de la passion à Constantinople (VIIe/VIIIe-XIIIe siècles),”

the matter is not as clear-cut as one might first think. In his Second *Antirrheticus* Patriarch Nicephorus avers that at the council Constantine had promised his bishops to obey them in all respects but that he had then broken his word and attacked the cult of the saints.⁵² Even clearer evidence is found in the *Acts* of the Council of Nicaea. There the quotation of the anathema is followed by the comment: "Therefore after this publication of theirs [i.e. the *Acts* of the Council of Hieria], they also rejected the well-received offering up of intercessions to God, having wiped it out from this writing of theirs; and this everybody knows."⁵³ The meaning of this passage is clear. It is claimed that after 754 the emperor had come to the conclusion that the council's pronouncement about the intercessions of the saints was not sufficiently orthodox and therefore needed to be excised. If the chronology in Theophanes' *Chronographia* is to be trusted, this step would have been taken around the year 765/6 when Constantine published his edict against the cult of the saints. Gero remarked that there is no strong reason for doubting the veracity of the comment.⁵⁴ Although it was not discussed by Auzépy, or by Brubaker and Haldon, we can assume that they would regard it as a fabrication.⁵⁵ Yet it is difficult to see how the organizers of the Council of Nicaea could have invented such a story when many of the participants would already have been in office during the reign of Constantine and thus would have had first-hand knowledge of his religious policies. One might still object that the decrees of a council could only be changed by another council. It is, however, not at all certain that Constantine felt bound by this rule. After all, we know that on other occasions he did not hesitate to interfere in the business of the church.⁵⁶ Thus we can conclude that Gero's assessment is in all likelihood correct.

In order to defend their interpretation Brubaker and Haldon put forward a further argument. They claim that Constantine could not have been opposed to the cult of the saints because it had been an integral part of Christian piety

in *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, eds. Jannic Durand and Bernard Flusin, (Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, Monographies) 17 (Paris: 2004), 15–30, esp. 21.

52 Patriarch Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* 11.4, 330–374, esp. 341CD.

53 *Acts of the Council of Nicaea*, ed. Mansi, 13, 349A.

54 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 147. So already Alfred Lombard, *Études d'histoire byzantine: Constantine V, Empereur des Romains, 740–775* (Paris: 1902), 121, 116.

55 Dagron, who was aware of Auzépy's interpretation, cautiously suggested that the comment might reflect historical reality. See Gilbert Dagron, "L'ombre d'un doute," 66.

56 See Dmitry Afanogenov, "Konstantinopolis episkopon echei: The rise of the patriarchal power in Byzantium, Part I: From Nicaenum II to the Second Outbreak of Iconoclasm," *Erytheia* 15 (1994), 45–65, esp. 46–47.

from the 4th century onwards.⁵⁷ Indeed, earlier emperors had taken a radically different approach. As Averil Cameron has highlighted, the successors of Justinian sought to shore up the legitimacy of their rule by claiming that they could rely on the intercessions of the saints.⁵⁸ In 1977 Gero struggled to find a precedent for Constantine's views. He pointed out that George the Monk had accused Constantine of being a member of the dualist heresy of the Paulicians. Yet he rightly doubted the veracity of this claim.⁵⁹

Recent research has given us a much clearer idea of what may have happened. In 1992 Gilbert Dagron published his seminal article "L'ombre d'un doute." In it he drew attention to a treatise by the priest Eustratius, a close collaborator of Patriarch Eutychius, which dates to the last decades of the 6th century. This text defends the cult of the saints against detractors.⁶⁰ According to Eustratius, some people claimed that after the separation from the body the soul was in a comatose state and that the saints could therefore not be active after death.⁶¹ In order to provide an explanation for the frequent apparitions of saints in dreams they declared that what the faithful saw were not the saints themselves but angels who had taken on their guise.⁶² Eustratius' treatise focuses on this topic whereas intercession is only mentioned in passing. Yet it is evident that the theory of a sleep of the soul also rules out intercessory prayers of the saints.⁶³ The issue then reappears in two collections of *Questions and Answers* by Anastasius of Sinai and by Pseudo-Athanasius, which date to the late 7th or early 8th century.⁶⁴ In these texts it is claimed that the soul can only act through the organs of the body and that disembodied souls must therefore be inactive. Yet an exception is made for the saints whose souls are said to be activated by the Holy Spirit and therefore capable of interceding with God on

57 See Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 32–38.

58 See Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past & Present* 84 (1979), 3–35; Averil Cameron, "The Early Religious Policies of Justin II," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976), 51–67.

59 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 151.

60 Dagron, "L'ombre," 64–65.

61 See Dirk Krausmüller, "God or angels as impersonators of saints: A belief and its contexts in the *Refutation* of Eustratius of Constantinople and in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai," *Gouden Hoorn* 6 (1998–1999), 5–16; Nicholas Constas, "An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople 'On the State of Souls after Death' (CPG 7522)," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002), 267–285; and Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great*, (Oxford Studies on Byzantium) (Oxford: 2012), 126–148.

62 See Dagron, "L'ombre," 65–66.

63 Krausmüller, "Contextualizing," 34.

64 Krausmüller, "Contextualizing," 40–41.

behalf of the living. Significantly, Anastasius and Pseudo-Athanasius retain the theory of angelic impersonation, although it is no longer required by the argument.⁶⁵ Comparison shows that the two collections of *Questions and Answers* drew on a common source where no exception was made for the saints. This source is no longer extant but it was still known in the late 8th and early 9th century when it upset the monks of Stoudios.⁶⁶ Interestingly, almost identical statements can be found in Nestorian sources from the 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries. The Nestorian Patriarch Timothy, a contemporary of Constantine V, declared in a letter that the souls of the saints are in a comatose state until the second coming when they will be given back their bodies and that they therefore do not have the power to intercede.⁶⁷

In Byzantium the debate continued into the Second Iconoclasm. This is evident from the writings of Methodius of Syracuse, the later patriarch of Constantinople. In his *Encomium* of Agatha, Methodius mentions that the martyr who had been thrown into prison was visited by the Apostle Peter. This episode is already found in the late antique *Passio*. Yet Methodius introduces one important modification. Each time he mentions Peter he explains that this was either Peter himself or an angel impersonating Peter.⁶⁸ This modification only makes sense if one part of the congregation believed that the saints cannot appear to the living. Even more pertinent is an anti-iconoclastic excursus in Methodius' *Life* of Theophanes the Confessor, which dates to the 820s.⁶⁹ There Methodius not only claims that his enemies reject the intercessions of the saints but also defends his own point of view against attacks. He offers an exegesis of two scriptural verses, Hebrews 11:39-40: "These [i.e. the heroes of the Old Testament] were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what has been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us they would be made perfect," and Revelation 6:9-11: "It was given to each of them [i.e. the Christian martyrs] a white garment, and it was said to them to rest yet a little while until there will be perfected their fellow-servants and their brothers who will be killed just

65 See Dagron, "L'ombre," 63.

66 Krausmüller, "Contextualizing," 42-43. See also Dirk Krausmüller, "'At the Resurrection we Will not Recognise One Another': Radical Devaluation of Social Relations in the Lost Model of Anastasius' and Pseudo-Athanasius' *Questions and Answers*," *Byzantion* 83 (2013), 207-27.

67 Krausmüller, "Contextualizing," 38-40.

68 See Krausmüller, "Denying Mary's Real Presence in Dreams and Visions: Divine Impersonation in the *Life* of Constantine the Ex-Jew," *Byzantion* 78 (2008), 288-303.

69 See Jean Gouillard, "Une œuvre inédite du patriarche Méthode: La Vie d'Euthyme de Sardes," *BZ* 53 (1960), 36-46, esp. 36-38.

like them.” From the way in which the argument is constructed it is clear that Methodius reacted to a specific exegesis of Hebrews 11:39-40, namely that “perfection” referred to the resurrection of the bodies, which would restore to the souls their powers to think, perceive and act. Methodius counters this exegesis with the similar-sounding verse from Revelation. He claims that the white garment that the souls of the martyrs are given represents the ability to act and to function as intercessors. According to him this does not contradict Hebrews 11:39-40 because it is only a partial reward whereas the full reward will be given at the Last Judgement. Significantly, the same reasoning already appears in the treatise of Eustratius. In this case, however, we know that it reflects an actual debate since the exegesis of Hebrews 11:39-40 was indeed proposed by the champions of a sleep of the soul.⁷⁰

It seems unlikely that Methodius would have reproduced this complex argument if at least some Iconoclasts had not also accepted the theory of a sleep of the soul and quoted the verse in Hebrews in order to prove their case. This raises the possibility that Constantine also held such a view. Indeed, as Jean Gouillard has shown, Patriarch Nicephorus once claims that he did.⁷¹ This suggests strongly that Constantine was not an isolated figure but participated in a broader discourse. As Gilbert Dagron has pointed out, it is entirely possible that the champions of the sleep of the soul espoused the iconoclast cause and that they formed a radical group within the iconoclast faction.⁷² When the Council of Hieria anathematized those who questioned the intercession of the saints the bishops may have had this group in mind.⁷³ Constantine would later have joined the extremists and in due course promulgated a law that reflected their position. This would have been a reversal of the policy of earlier emperors who had emphasized the importance of the cult of the saints.⁷⁴ Constantine’s initiative, however, did not have a long-lasting effect. Already his son Leo IV returned to the status quo even though he maintained the iconoclastic position. This may well have been the reason why the topic is hardly mentioned in the *Acts* of the Council of Nicaea.⁷⁵ This does, of course, not mean that the extremists disappeared after Constantine’s death. Hagiographical texts such as

⁷⁰ Krausmüller, “Contextualizing,” 36–37, 46–47.

⁷¹ Jean Gouillard, “Léthargie des âmes et culte des saints: Un plaidoyer inédit de Jean diacre et maïstôr,” *TM* 8 (1981), 171–86, 182, n. 53.

⁷² See Dagron, “L’ombre,” 65–66.

⁷³ See Lombard, *Études d’histoire byzantine*, 116.

⁷⁴ See Matthew Dal Santo, “The God-Protected Empire? Scepticism Towards the Cult of Saints in Early Byzantium,” in *An Age of Saints?* ed. Philip Booth, Matthew Dal Santo, and Peter Sarris, 129–149.

⁷⁵ See Krausmüller, “Contextualizing,” 32–33.

the *Life* of Joannicius suggest that they continued to agitate against the cult of the saints.⁷⁶ Yet they now did so without imperial support.

One can only speculate why Constantine took up their cause. From the treatise *Against Constantine the Horseman* it appears that the emperor was a moral rigorist who believed that Christians need to secure their own salvation and cannot rely on the help of others. It is also possible that this belief was informed by social experience. As we have seen the defenders of the cult of saints unselfconsciously drew parallels between the two spheres. They pointed out that one does not approach powerful people directly but pursues one's case through middlemen, and then concluded that the same rules guide the interaction between the individual believer and God. Accordingly, one can argue that radical iconoclasts projected onto the afterlife their own view of society, which was deeply suspicious of social networking.⁷⁷ Constantine may well have been attracted to this view because it agreed with his exalted understanding of the imperial office, which left no room for powerful intercessors.

2 Relics

In the entry for the year 765/6 Theophanes not only claims that Constantine V outlawed the practice of calling on saints for help. He also avers that the emperor "buried and obliterated their holy relics."⁷⁸ This measure, too, was in contravention of the decrees of the Council of Hieria, which affirmed that Mary and the other saints should be venerated not only in soul but also in body.⁷⁹ In order to explain this discrepancy, Georg Ostrogorsky and Stephen Gero argued that the emperor's views on the matter had gradually become more extreme.⁸⁰ This hypothesis was rejected by John Wortley and Marie-France Auzépy who maintained that accounts of the destruction of relics were entirely legendary.⁸¹ As we have seen, Auzépy had come to the same conclusion when she discussed evidence that presented the emperor as an enemy of the saints. Yet in the case of relics her conclusion was more nuanced. She did not dismiss iconophile statements as complete fabrications but rather

76 See Krausmüller, "Contextualizing," 32.

77 See Krausmüller, "'At the Resurrection,'" 225–27.

78 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, trans. Mango, Scott, and Greatrex, 607.

79 Krannich, Schubert, Sode, and von Stockhausen, *Die ikonoklastische Synode*, 64–65.

80 Ostrogorsky, *History*, 175; Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 152.

81 John Wortley, "Iconoclasm and Leipsanoclasm: Leo III, Constantine V and the Relics," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982), 253–79.

suggested that they merely distorted reality.⁸² In order to make her case she drew attention to a passage in Patriarch Nicephorus' *Refutatio* of the Synod of 815 where Constantine is addressed with the following words: "And it is a law to you that these [sc. Relics] are no more deposited under the sacred tables which are founded in the place of divine sacrifice, decreeing that they are opposed to the lawgiving of the Christians."⁸³ This text she claimed showed that the iconoclasts were not opposed to the cult of relics as such but only to the deposition of relics in altars because they were keen to emphasize the difference between God present in the Eucharist and the saints present in their relics. Motivated by fear of pollution, they would then have removed the relics from the altars and placed them elsewhere.

Auzépy's interpretation is highly persuasive and has been readily accepted by other scholars. Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon state that the iconoclast position was determined once and for all by the Council of Hieria.⁸⁴ Yet it needs to be remembered that the Iconoclasts were not a homogeneous group. We have already seen that some of them believed in the intercessions of saints whereas others did not. Thus one can hypothesize that the same spectrum of opinions existed in the case of relics, too. One group would then have accepted and even promoted the veneration of relics whereas the other would have rejected it. This allows for a return to the interpretation of Gero and Ostrogorsky since it can be argued that in the case of relics Constantine V veered from a moderate to a radical position, just as he did in the case of intercessions.

As we have seen the radical wing of the iconoclast faction based their rejection of the intercessions of the saints on the notion of a "sleep of the soul." Thus, one might conclude that these people regarded the veneration of relics as a useless practice because there would be no point in addressing the saints through their mortal remains and expecting miracles from them when their souls were inactive. Yet matters are not so straightforward. First of all, we cannot simply assume that there was just one way in which the faithful related to relics. Already in late antiquity there had been no agreement on this topic. Not everybody believed that the saints were present in their relics. John Chrysostom, for example, told his congregation: "Do not focus on the fact that

82 Marie-France Auzépy, "Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré: L'église et les reliques," in *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident*, ed. Michel Kaplan (Paris: 2001), 13–24, esp. 17–20. The Council of Nicaea then decreed that relics be deposited in all altars, which suggests that this practice had not yet been universal.

83 Jeffrey Michael Featherstone, *Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani refutatio et ever-sio definitionis synodalis anni 815*, CCSG 33 (Turnhout: 1997), ch. 119, 210.

84 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 38–40.

the body of the martyr lies there devoid of psychic activity but consider that another power greater than that of the soul itself is with it, the grace of the Holy Spirit, which gives proof to all of the resurrection through the miracles it performs.”⁸⁵ Chrysostom does, of course, believe that dead saints are active and capable of interceding with God. Nevertheless, he limits their scope of action by denying them the power to act through their mortal remains.

That Chrysostom holds such a view should not surprise us. We have already encountered a similar position in the case of the apparitions of saints. In the late 7th century Anastasius of Sinai claimed that the saints intercede with God on our behalf but that it is angels in their guise who effect cures. The clear parallel suggests that Chrysostom’s position was still current in the Byzantine “Dark Age.” Indeed, a similar argument is found in a text from the Second Iconoclasm, Methodius’ *scholia* on the *Passio* of Marina. There we read: “One must remark that St Basil says that to the churches that are dedicated to the saints angels are sent to perform miracles, but where the body of the saints is, grace acts through the relics themselves.”⁸⁶ Since Methodius was a defender of the posthumous activity of saints one would have expected him to state that the saints themselves act through their relics. Instead, he claims that the same God acts through two different intermediaries, angels and relics. Methodius was an iconophile but it seems likely that moderate iconoclasts held the same view.

Such an understanding of relic veneration is reconcilable with the belief in a “sleep of the soul,” which was propagated by the radical iconoclasts. This is evident from the writings of the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy. As we have already seen Timothy believed that the souls of the saints were unconscious and therefore could not do anything for the faithful. Yet in one of his letters he condoned the practice of kissing and embracing relics. According to him this practice should not be abandoned because the relics of the saints had become temples of the Holy Spirit and because canon law and the Fathers had demanded that relics be honoured.⁸⁷ Significantly, Timothy emphasized that the saints should be venerated as friends of God and not as if they were themselves divine, and he demanded that their relics be deposited not in churches but in separate buildings. This position resembles very closely that of the

85 John Chrysostom, *De s. hieromartyre Babyla*, PG 50: 527–34, esp. 529.

86 Methodius, *Acta s. Marinae et s. Christophori*, ed. Hermann Usener (Bonn: 1886), 53 (scholion 18). There is no corresponding passage in the works of Basil.

87 Patriarch Timothy, *Epistulae*, vol. 1, ed. Oskar Braun, CSCO 74–75 (Paris: 1915), 182–183 (*Epistula* 36).

Byzantine iconoclasts. Like them, Timothy was concerned with maintaining a distance between God and the saints.

Timothy expected those who venerated relics directly to address the Holy Spirit who resided in them. Accordingly, one could imagine that the radical iconoclasts held a similar position. In that case there would have been no need to outlaw the veneration of relics, which formed a much more integral part of the Christian tradition than the cult of images. It would have been sufficient to reeducate the faithful so that they would no longer regard relics as a means of communication with the saints. Such a scenario has already been envisaged by Auzépy who suggests that while iconoclasts were not opposed to intercession as such they may have rejected the custom of directing intercessory prayers to relics.⁸⁸

Thus, it seems that we must dismiss iconophile claims that the iconoclasts destroyed relics. Such a conclusion, however, would be premature because it does not take into account the fact that there were different kinds of relics. This becomes obvious when we focus on the one example that is mentioned in Byzantine texts, the mortal remains of the martyr Euphemia of Chalcedon, which had been translated to Constantinople in the first half of the 7th century and were venerated there in a church dedicated to her name. There exist several different accounts of the events, which have been discussed by Gero.⁸⁹ The most important of these are the entry for the year 765/6 in Theophanes' *Chronographia* and a lengthy speech by Constantine, bishop of Tios, which gives the impression of an eyewitness account but may date to the second half of the 9th century.⁹⁰ Theophanes' and Constantine's narratives differ in one important point. For the former the culprit is Constantine V whereas for the latter it is Constantine's father Leo III. Otherwise, however, the two authors tell the same story. The container with Euphemia's relics is removed from the church, dumped into the sea and then miraculously transported to the island of Lemnos from where it is brought back to the capital by Irene and Constantine VI in the year 796. This leaves no doubt that in the late 8th century Euphemia's relics were not in the capital. Their absence must therefore be accounted for. Two explanations have been offered. Wortley has argued that the relics had been lost when the church was temporarily abandoned after an earthquake.⁹¹ Brubaker and Haldon have contended that the relics had not been destroyed but only removed to the palace where they were then

88 Auzépy, "Les Isauriens," 21.

89 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, 152–165.

90 Shevchenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period," 121, 124.

91 Wortley, "Leipsanoclasm," 276–277.

mislaïd. Neither argument is persuasive. Euphemia was a major saint of the Byzantine Church, venerated not only as a martyr but also as a guarantor of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, and takes pride of place in liturgical calendars of the 8th century. It is therefore inconceivable that her remains would simply have been forgotten.⁹²

Thus, we are forced to consider the possibility that this was after all a case of relic destruction. First of all, it needs to be noted that Euphemia's relics were of a particular kind. According to the sources they were not small fragments but an intact corpse. Moreover, this corpse was not inactive. Once a year, on the day of Euphemia's commemoration, it discharged a blood-like liquid, which was used to cure diseases.⁹³ This type of annual miracle is first attested in the 6th century for patron saints of cities, such as the Apostle Andrew in Patras and the martyr Glyceria in Heraclea.⁹⁴ It is evident that it was a pious fraud, intended to reassure congregations of the continuing care of their patron saints. Thus, it is not surprising that Euphemia's posthumous activity raised the suspicion of sceptics.⁹⁵ According to the historian Theophylact Simocatta, Emperor Maurice "belittled the miracles, rejected the wonder outright, and attributed the mystery to men's crafty devices," and had the tomb sealed in order to test the veracity of the claims.⁹⁶ This threat was averted, most likely through some last-minute diplomacy. Yet this did not mean that the doubts disappeared altogether. The Melkite historian Sa'id ibn Batriq, also known as Eutychius, records that the last iconoclast emperor, Theophilus, heard about an icon of the Virgin, which lactated on her feast day. When he had it inspected it turned out that the liquid was poured in through pipes.⁹⁷ This story may be legendary, but it still shows that people during iconoclasm were aware of the trickery on which the miracle was based. Thus, it can be argued that Leo

92 Albert J. M. Erhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 1.1 (Texte und Untersuchungen) 50 (Leipzig: 1937), 28–35.

93 Constantine of Tios, *Sermo*, ed. François Halkin, *Euphémie de Chalcédoine: Légendes byzantines* (Subsidia Hagiographica) 41 (Brussels: 1965), 81–106, 88.

94 Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta: An English Translation with Introduction* (Oxford: 1986), 1.11.3, 35; Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, trans. Raymond Van Dam (Translated Texts for Historians) 4 (Liverpool: 1988), ch. 30, 27.

95 Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: 2012), 80–81.

96 Whitby and Whitby, *History*, VIII.14.1, 233. For a somewhat different interpretation see Matthew Dal Santo, "The God-Protected Empire?," 129–149.

97 Herman Hennephof, *Textus Byzantinos ad iconomachiam pertinentes in usum academicum* (Leiden: 1969), n. 44, 23–24.

III or Constantine V moved against this particular type of relic because they regarded it as a sham.

At this point it is worth having a closer look at Constantine's account. There we are informed that the emperor did not simply remove the genuine relics but replaced them with "previously prepared desiccated bones of a dead person."⁹⁸ Having made the exchange, he convened a public gathering in which he told those present to go and see "the error from which suffer those who say that the relic of the most-renowned Euphemia is uncorrupted and pours forth ointment." When these people found that the corpse was not "fleshly" as they had expected, they lost their faith in the saint. As Michel Kaplan has pointed out it is, of course, impossible to ascertain whether these events really took place.⁹⁹ Yet one should not dismiss them out of hand as an iconophile fabrication. It is evident that Constantine's story is best understood as a response to a real event where the sarcophagus was opened and where only dry bones were discovered. Constantine then tells us that the box containing the bones was removed from the church. This act, however, is clearly of little significance because the relic had already lost its supernatural aura. This would suggest that the measures of the iconoclast emperors were not acts of wanton destruction, which would only have created popular resistance, but rather carefully choreographed events intended to undermine the special status of uncorrupted relics.

Significantly, Constantine counters this strategy by emphasizing that Euphemia was a "living corpse." In his account of the miraculous interventions of the martyr at the Council of Chalcedon he tells us that the bishops decided to put the definition of faith "on the fleshly relic of the saint," which then was still in its original place, and asked for a revelation. When they approached the relic God "animated the dead hand of the martyr and stretched it out, and the all-famous martyr of Christ took the document in her hand, kissed it and piously returned the definition again to the servants of the orthodox faith."¹⁰⁰ A survey of the hagiographical dossier of Euphemia reveals that Constantine's account is a reworking of an originally much simpler story. According to this story the bishops put two declarations of faith into the coffin, then closed the lid and waited for several days, and when they opened it again, they found the orthodox declaration in the hands of the martyr and the Nestorian one below her feet.¹⁰¹

98 Constantine of Tios, *Sermo*, 88–89 (my translation).

99 Michel Kaplan, *La chrétienté byzantine du début du VII^e siècle au milieu du XI^e siècle: Images et reliques, moines et moniales, Constantinople et Rome* (Paris: 1997), 87.

100 Constantine of Tios, *Sermo*, 94 (my translation).

101 Halkin, *Euphémie de Chalcedoine*, 167, note 1.

Such stories of posthumous activity are quite common in the Second Iconoclasm. In the *Life* of Philotheus of Opsikion, which most likely dates to the first half of the 9th century, we are told: "When a year after his death he was translated to a different place, he himself stretched out his hand as if living, gripped the shoulders of the two priests who wanted to translate him and stood up, and having made three steps he was deposited in the place in which he now lies."¹⁰² A very similar story is found in the *Life* of Eudocimus the Righteous, who died in the year 840.¹⁰³ A third text, Methodius' *Life* of Euthymius of Sardes, which dates to the 830s, helps us to explain the heightened interest in "active" relics. Methodius regards the fact that the saint's corpse does not decompose, that it discharges liquid, and that it moves as proof that the saint's soul is active. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that souls have no awareness if the corpses do not show these signs. Methodius' argument is clearly directed against iconoclasts who subscribed to the notion of a "sleep of the soul." Yet one can wonder whether it is not also a response to a broader crisis of belief in the supernatural.¹⁰⁴

3 Monks

In later centuries Constantine V was remembered as an enemy not only of saints and relics but also of the monastic estate. During church services congregations heard that the emperor had savagely punished monks and nuns. The hagiographers who had told these stories left no doubt as to the reason for such treatment. They insisted that their heroes incurred the emperor's wrath because they had opposed his iconoclast policy. Modern scholarship has chipped away at this picture. Three narratives, devoted to the hermits Andrew and Paul and to the nun Theodosia, have been shown to be entirely fictitious.¹⁰⁵ This leaves only one text, the *Life* of Stephen the Younger, hermit on Mount St Auxentius near Chalcedon, which was composed 807–9 by a patriarchal deacon. Stephen was undoubtedly a historical personality since he

¹⁰² Hippolyte Delehaye, *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris) (Brussels: 1902), 47–48.

¹⁰³ Chrysanth Loparev, "Zhitie svjatago Evdokima," *Izvestija Russkago Archeologicheskago Instituta v Konstantinopole* 13 (1908), 152–252, esp. 156–158 (my translation).

¹⁰⁴ Dirk Krausmüller, "Sleeping Souls and Moving Corpses: Patriarch Methodius' Defence of the Cult of Saints," *Byzantion* 85 (2015), 143–55.

¹⁰⁵ Gero, *Iconoclasm*, 128–129; Dirk Krausmüller, "The Identity, the Cult and the Hagiographical Dossier of Andrew 'in Crisi'," *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 44 (2007), 57–86.

is already mentioned in Nicephorus' *Breviarium*, which was probably written two decades of the saint's death on 20 November 765.¹⁰⁶ In the *Life* Stephen, too, is presented as a staunch defender of icon worship. We are told that in 754 he refused to sign the decree of the Council of Hieria;¹⁰⁷ that a few years later he rebuffed a delegation of metropolitans who had come to win him over to the emperor's policy,¹⁰⁸ and that he did not even budge when eventually Constantine himself called him into his presence in order to interrogate him.¹⁰⁹ This uncompromising stance is said to have brought him imprisonment, exile and ultimately death at the hands of the Constantinopolitan mob.¹¹⁰

Stephen's story is presented so persuasively that it has often been taken at face value. Georg Ostrogorsky, for example, saw in Stephen the leader of the iconophile resistance during Constantine's reign, and Stephen Gero considered him to be "a martyr for image-worship."¹¹¹ Yet a closer look at his *Life* suggests that matters are not quite so straightforward. We read that Stephen also raised the ire of the emperor because he had encouraged the noblewoman Anna to become a nun and admitted the courtier George and some soldiers into his community.¹¹² Significantly, this theme is at the centre of Nicephorus' account. There we find no reference to images but are instead told that the saint was punished for his attempt to win over to the monastic life members of Constantine's entourage. A third piece of information completes this picture. Theophanes declares that on 25 August 765 nineteen dignitaries were paraded in the Hippodrome and then executed "for having made evil designs on the emperor." He insists that this was a trumped-up charge because they were popular with the people and "because of their piety and for resorting to the aforementioned recluse whose sufferings they proclaimed in public."¹¹³ Reading between the lines, Peter Brown and Marie-France Auzépy have concluded that Stephen had conspired with members of the elite and that he was executed for treason and not for his defence of icon worship.¹¹⁴ Where the two scholars disagree is whether images played any role at all. For Brown Stephen was a committed iconophile whereas Auzépy is much more cautious.

106 Nicephorus, *Short History*, ch. 81, 155.

107 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne le Jeune*, ch. 29–30, 129–130.

108 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 41–42, 141–142.

109 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 45, 146, ch. 55, 154–155.

110 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 30, 130, ch. 41, 141, ch. 46, 147, ch. 69–72, 169–171.

111 Ostrogorsky, *History*, 174; Gero, *Iconoclasm*, 128.

112 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 33–35, 132–134, ch. 37–39, 136–139.

113 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 605.

114 Peter Brown, "Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy," *EHR* 88 (1973), 1–34, esp. 32; and Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, 25–34, in much greater detail.

As Brown has pointed out Stephen represented a particular type of monk, the charismatic holy man who dabbled in politics and at times pronounced prophecies about the duration of the reign of emperors. Such people had always been considered traitors and punished accordingly.¹¹⁵ It is likely that another victim of Constantine, the hermit Andrew (or Peter), belonged to the same category.¹¹⁶ Yet not all actions of the emperor can be explained in this manner. One cannot simply dismiss the claim that Stephen was persecuted because he recruited new monks among the members of the Constantinopolitan upper class. Moreover, Stephen's hagiographer states clearly that Constantine targeted not just individuals but the entire monastic estate, calling the monks "unmentionables,"¹¹⁷ telling his subjects to shun them,¹¹⁸ and ordering his officials to subject them to all manner of tortures.¹¹⁹ Stephen is said to have counselled the victims to flee to distant provinces or leave the empire altogether,¹²⁰ and later to have comforted some of them who stayed in the same prison as he did.¹²¹ In this case, too, it is claimed that the monks were persecuted because they refused to accept Constantine's iconoclast policy.¹²² This view, which is already expressed in Nicephorus' *Breviarium*, is not without basis in reality.¹²³ In the *Life* of the neo-martyr Romanus, which was written in the Caliphate shortly after the year 780, we read that two deacons migrated from Constantinople to Isauria where they became monks and then left the empire because they did not want to live under an iconoclast emperor.¹²⁴ Yet scholars are now agreed that monks were also attacked simply because they were monks.

This raises the question: why did the emperor turn against monks? The *Life* of Stephen the Younger gives the impression that Constantine was a borderline lunatic who had conceived an irrational hatred against the monastic estate and at the same time lusted for comely youths.¹²⁵ This led Stephen Gero to

115 Haldon and Brubaker, *Iconoclast Era*, 236.

116 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 598.

117 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, 38–39.

118 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 24, 120.

119 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 58–59, 160–161.

120 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 28, 125.

121 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 56, 157–158.

122 Auzépy, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclisme byzantin*, 191–94, considers most of these claims to be exaggerations or outright fabrications.

123 Nicephorus, *Short History*, ch. 80, 153–154.

124 Paul Peeters, "S. Romain, le néomartyr (†1 mai 780) d'après un monument Géorgien," *Analecta Bollandiana* 30 (1911), 393–427, esp. ch. 8, 414.

125 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, ch. 37, 136–137; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 611.

conclude that the emperor was a libertine who could not bear the monks' criticism of his life-style.¹²⁶ Such an interpretation, however, is flawed because it fails to take into account the highly tendentious nature of iconophile accounts. Brubaker and Haldon, on the other hand, have suggested that Constantine was reacting to a decline in monastic standards. Yet as they themselves admit the evidence for such a scenario is very slight.¹²⁷ The most thought-provoking interpretation has been offered by Brown. Brown declares that "iconomachy in action is monachomachy." By this he does not simply mean that monks were defenders of images. He rather sees a structural similarity between the icon and the holy man, pointing out that in both cases power is derived from popular acclaim and not from the approbation of the ruling elite. As a consequence, he is of the opinion that both icon and monk represented "unvested inarticulate power," being the expression of and at the same time reinforcing centrifugal tendencies within Byzantine society. As such they constituted a challenge to the articulate power of the state and the lay church, which insisted that the Eucharist as performed by properly ordained priests was the sole link between God and humankind.¹²⁸ The picture that Brown draws is very seductive but at the same time highly speculative as we know very little about monastic milieus at the time.¹²⁹ One can ask whether it is justified to subsume all monks under the category of "holy man." Indeed, from the admittedly limited source material one gets the impression that anti-monastic measures targeted quite ordinary monks who might never have staked a claim to personal sanctity.

In order to understand the emperor's motives, it is necessary to have a closer look at his actions. In the *Breviarium* Nicephorus states that lured by the emperor's promise to give them high offices, some monks "abandoned their calling and taking off the venerable garb showed themselves to be hairy instead of tonsured, and immediately adapted themselves to the habit of lay-people, accepted to consort with women and accepted marriage with them."¹³⁰ In the *Life* of Romanus it is claimed that monks took the same step because the emperor threatened them with punishment.¹³¹ This particular aspect of Constantine's anti-monastic policy is described in some detail in Theophanes'

126 Gero, *Iconoclasm*, 141–142.

127 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 245.

128 Brown, "Dark-Age Crisis," 30–32. See also Marie-France Auzépy, "L'évolution de l'attitude face au miracle à Byzance (VIIe-IXe siècles)," in *Miracles, prodiges et merveilles au Moyen Âge* (Paris: 1995), 31–46.

129 Accepted by Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, 38, and Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 244–45.

130 Nicephorus, *Short History*, ch. 81, 155.

131 Peeters, "S. Romain," ch. 7, 413.

Chronographia. On 21 August 765 Constantine V ordered that “each monk hold a woman by the hand and so process through the Hippodrome’ in Constantinople.¹³² Five years later, in 769/70, the emperor’s confidant Michael Lachanodrakon took a similar measure in the theme of the *Thrakesioi*, which he governed. He gathered together monks and nuns on the polo-ground outside Ephesus and told them: “Who wants to obey the emperor and us, put on a white garb and take a wife in this hour, but those who do not want to do this will be blinded and exiled to Cyprus.”¹³³

This raises the question: why were these measures taken? Brubaker and Haldon suggest that the monks paraded in the Hippodrome had taken part in the same conspiracy as Stephen the Younger.¹³⁴ At first sight this hypothesis appears to be convincing because the dignitaries involved in the conspiracy were executed on 25 August, only four days after the mass wedding. It has, however, a serious drawback. It cannot explain why the same measures were taken in the provinces. It seems highly unlikely that monks in the theme of the *Thrakesioi* had been involved in a plot that had taken place in the capital five years earlier.¹³⁵ As a consequence, Brubaker and Haldon speak in very general terms of a challenge of the emperor’s authority by monastic communities.¹³⁶ In order to support their interpretation they claim that the measures against monks and nuns were of strictly limited duration, ending four years before Constantine’s death in 775, presumably because the emperor’s rule was safe now and there was no longer a need for extraordinary measures.¹³⁷ Such an interpretation is highly problematic. While it is true that Theophanes makes no mention of anti-monastic measures after the year 770/1, the scarcity of the source material does not allow for an argument from silence.

Auzépy is more careful. She notes the similarity of the treatment of the dignitaries and the monks but only concludes that both were considered enemies of the state, without giving further explanations. In contrast to Brubaker and Haldon, she claims that Constantine’s measures targeted monasticism as a way of life, thus agreeing with the interpretation of Ostrogorsky, Brown, and Gero.¹³⁸ Yet she immediately adds the qualification that Constantine moved

¹³² Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 605.

¹³³ Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 614.

¹³⁴ Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 238–39.

¹³⁵ Even if Lachanodrakon acted independently in order to curry favour with the emperor, one would still need to explain why Constantine was “anti-monastic” even at this late date.

¹³⁶ Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 240.

¹³⁷ Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 241.

¹³⁸ Auzépy, *La Vie d’Étienne*, 36.

only against “bad monks.” Since she has already excluded that monks were defenders of icon worship she offers an alternative explanation for why they fell foul of the emperor. She claims that they did not pray for him or even resisted his will, although she is not able to support her hypothesis with firm evidence.¹³⁹ For Auzépy, too, the forced marriages are first and foremost a punishment. Since they had not done their duty the monks could no longer claim that they deserved the status of a religious elite and were therefore reintegrated into the common Christian flock.¹⁴⁰

Auzépy's interpretation is at odds with Byzantine sources, which insist that Constantine wished to wipe out the entire monastic estate.¹⁴¹ Theophanes claims that Lachanodrakon “did not leave in the whole theme that was under his authority a single man wearing the monastic habit” and further intimates that the same measures were taken by other governors in their themes.¹⁴² In order to defend it, Auzépy points out that iconophile authors were given to exaggeration. Indeed, Theophanes' claim that the monastery of Dios in Constantinople was turned into a soldiers' barracks is patently untrue because it is described as functioning in the *Life* of Stephen the Younger. Moreover, it is very unlikely that the many monasteries listed in the *Acts* of the Second Council of Nicaea had all been closed and then reopened.¹⁴³ As a consequence she can claim that the surviving houses were peopled by “good monks.” This hypothesis is problematic since it does not consider other possible reasons for the patchy implementation of Constantine's anti-monastic measures. Indeed, one could with equal justification argue that the eradication of monasticism was a long-term goal and that compromises had to be struck along the way.

Supposing that Constantine wished to eradicate monasticism as a way of life has one great advantage. It is no longer necessary to look for a mysterious crime, which was then punished with forced marriages. Instead of assuming that such marriages were a demotion one could argue that Constantine rejected the very notion that monks constituted a Christian elite and instead saw marriage and procreation as the proper pursuits for Christians. At first sight this interpretation seems to be contradicted by Theophanes' claim that the emperor wished to hold up “to public scorn and dishonour the monastic habit” and that the monks gathered in the Hippodrome were “spat upon

139 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, 38.

140 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, 38–39.

141 Gero, *Iconoclasm*, 139; Warren T. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: 1997), 305.

142 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 615.

143 Auzépy, *La Vie d'Étienne*, 37; Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 240–41.

and insulted by all the people.”¹⁴⁴ Auzépy does not doubt the veracity of this claim.¹⁴⁵ Yet one can wonder whether the emperor would have thus cheapened the institution of marriage, which he and his father had legislated on in the *Ecloga* and which, according to Alexander Kazhdan, was increasingly becoming the cornerstone of Byzantine society.¹⁴⁶

Unfortunately, Iconoclast texts, which could cast light on the views of the enemies of monasticism, have not come down to us. There is only one exception, the chapter about virginity in John of Damascus’ treatise *Exposition of the Faith*.¹⁴⁷ As one might expect John extols virginity as the supreme form of human existence that elevates human being to the rank of angels. By contrast, marriage is no more than a necessary evil because it provides a lawful escape for those who cannot suppress their sexual urges. Yet John does not merely state his own views. Much of the chapter is taken up with a defence of virginity against its detractors. On the whole there is little original about John’s argument, which relies heavily on late antique treatises on virginity. There is, however, one exception, the statement: “The carnal ones denigrate virginity and the lovers of pleasure put forward as proof the verse: ‘Cursed be everybody who does not raise a seed in Israel.’” This is a reference to people who turned John’s views on virginity and marriage on the head and were prepared to argue their case. Who were these people? We know that there was opposition to monasticism in 8th-century Palestine.¹⁴⁸ Yet it seems more likely that they were inhabitants of the Byzantine Empire. The proof text itself suggests as much. At first sight it appears to be a quotation from the Old Testament. This, however, is not the case. While the formula “cursed be everybody who ...” occurs several times there it is never used in connection with the refusal to procreate. The closest parallel is the story of Onan who did not wish to consummate his marriage with Tamar and was consequently killed by God.¹⁴⁹ It seems likely that this punishment was recast as a curse in order to bring into sharp focus the high esteem for marriage and fatherhood that is characteristic

144 Theophanes, *Chronicle*, 605.

145 Auzépy, *La Vie d’Étienne*, 36. See, however, Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 241.

146 Mike T. G. Humphreys, *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era: c. 680–850* (Oxford: 2015), 113–118; Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Washington, DC: 1982), 87–88.

147 Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 2 (Berlin and New York: 1973), ch. 97, 227–30.

148 Bartolomeo Pirone, *Leonzio di Damasco, Vita di Santo Stefano Sabbaita (725–794): Testo arabo, introduzione, traduzione e note* (Studia orientalia christiana) 4 (Cairo: 1991), 220–224.

149 Genesis 38:8–10.

of the Old Testament. The fact that the curse makes mention of Israel is highly suggestive. Although it could be understood as a reference to all Christians it seems more likely that it specifically referred to the Byzantine Empire, which was often described as the “New Israel.”¹⁵⁰ Then it would have made the fathering of children for ‘king and country’ a religious duty and disqualified monks as godless traitors. This argument is highly unusual because it challenges the traditional interpretation that the ‘carnal’ law of the Old Testament had been superseded by the ‘spiritual’ law of the New Testament.¹⁵¹

The curse of those who fail to procreate does not feature in earlier texts, which suggests that it was manufactured by a contemporary of John’s. It is unlikely that this person was Constantine himself. John is thought to have died no later than 754.¹⁵² At that time, however, the emperor was still favourable to monks. As Brubaker and Haldon have pointed out, their existence is taken for granted in the *Ecloga* and the Council of Hieria considers them to be the Christian elite. Moreover, we know that Constantine’s third wife made donations to the monastery of Mantineon.¹⁵³ That the debate about monasticism predates the emperor’s measures by at least a decade is highly significant. It suggests that there was already an anti-monastic current in Byzantium, which then influenced Constantine’s actions.

It goes without saying that such momentous changes do not happen in a void. Therefore, one must ask why monasticism became a contentious issue. As we have seen the sources mention two measures, the selling off of monastic property and the marrying off of monks. We know that at least some of the property was given to soldiers, and we can assume that the newlyweds procreated.¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, Haldon and Brubaker have suggested that the measures had a beneficial effect on Byzantine society at a time of demographic decline and military weakness. It would be reductionist to claim that the new Christian ideal was simply a pretext, which permitted the emperor to increase the resources of the state.¹⁵⁵ Yet there can be little doubt that Constantine also considered the practical dimension of his measures. Indeed, there is an almost contemporary parallel for his actions in China. In the year 845 the embattled Tang Emperor Wuzong closed all Buddhist monasteries, confiscated their lands and moveable property, and forced all monks and nuns under the age of

150 Humphreys, *Law, Power*, 104–105.

151 John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei*, 97, ed. Kotter, 229.45–51.

152 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 183.

153 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 240–41.

154 Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 243, n. 365.

155 Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power*, 86.

forty to return to lay life.¹⁵⁶ Wuzong was personally hostile to Buddhist clergy but in this case, too, the measures also made sense in terms of *realpolitik*. The confiscated land and the productive power of the ex-monks and nuns had a thoroughly beneficial effect on the imperial treasury. Significantly, in his edicts Wuzong not only outlined the practical steps that he had decided to take but also proceeded to justify them. Drawing on the teachings of Confucius, he extolled the family as the institution that ensured the survival of society and state.¹⁵⁷

It is difficult to determine what kind of society the emperor envisaged. Only one text, the so-called *Laws of the Himyarites*, may give us an indirect insight. It presents itself as a collection of laws promulgated in the 6th century for a Christian community on the Arab Peninsula. Yet the setting is entirely fictitious, serving as a vehicle for the anonymous author's vision of the perfect Christian society. In its present form the text seems to date to the 10th century but it has been argued that it was originally composed in the 8th to 9th centuries.¹⁵⁸ Marriage plays an important role in the text. Parents are obliged to marry off their children between the ages of ten and twelve. If they do not do so they are fined and may even lose all their property.¹⁵⁹ This is at odds with Byzantine canon law, which specifies that girls and boys should not marry before the ages of twelve and fourteen respectively, and also with contemporary custom.¹⁶⁰ What are the reasons for this deviation? The author is obsessed with sexual purity and envisages heavy punishments for transgressions. This suggests that he wished to prevent premarital sexual relations. There may, however, be a second agenda discernible. In Byzantine hagiography saints are often said to have defied their parents' wishes to get married and to have made the decision to enter monasteries instead. In such instances it is regularly added that their beard had just started to grow, which suggests that they were sixteen or seventeen years old.¹⁶¹ It is evident that a younger child would not yet have been capable of taking such a step, unless it was extremely precocious. Thus,

156 See Michael T. Dalby, "Court Politics in Late T'ang Times," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 11: *Sui and Tang China, 589–906*, part 1, ed. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: 1979), 561–681, esp. 666–667.

157 *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, trans. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, vol. 1 (2nd ed., New York: 1999), 585–586.

158 A summary of the discussion can be found in Albrecht Berger, *Life and works of Saint Gergentius, Archbishop of Taphar* (Berlin and New York: 2006), 82–91.

159 Berger, *Life and Works*, 418.

160 Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Byzantinisches Handbuch) 2.1 (Munich: 1959), 88.

161 Cecily Hennessy, *Images of Children in Byzantium* (Ashgate: 2008), 16–17.

one could argue that the *Laws of the Himyarites* are implicitly anti-monastic. Monastic life is not ruled out – indeed, it is stated that people are free to become monks and nuns – but it is limited to widows and widowers who have already done their duty to society.¹⁶² This does, of course, not necessarily mean that the author of the original text was an iconoclast. After all, it is conceivable that a person might reject monasticism and yet be in favour of icon worship.

As I have already pointed out there is no sign of an official rejection of monasticism as such during the Second Iconoclasm. Monasteries that accepted the official line were left in peace and even benefitted from the largess of the emperors. This does, of course, not mean that there was no opposition to monks at all. A relative of Joannicius who is identified as a follower of Constantine is said to have rejected icons and railed against the monastic habit.¹⁶³

The flourishing of monasticism in the Second Iconoclasm was the result of the coenobitic revival, which had gained force during the reign of Constantine's son Leo IV, and which had led to the invigoration of existing monastic houses in Constantinople and to the foundation of many monastic houses in the provinces. In the 9th century several saints' *lives* were produced that extolled the monastic estate and its virtues of chastity, dispassion, and asceticism, which were presented as the precondition for wonderworking. This does not, however, mean that the high regard for marriage had disappeared. Quite the contrary. It was at that time that the so-called "iconoclast" *lives* were produced. As Shevchenko and Auzépy have established, these texts have several common characteristics. There is no mention of icons and icon worship, miracles have a social component, and verses from the Old Testament are frequently quoted.¹⁶⁴ When it comes to the question of chastity the corpus is quite heterogeneous. Some saints such as George of Amastris were monks whereas others were laymen. The laymen themselves belong to two categories. The state official Eudocimus who died in the 840s is said to have been chaste despite living in the world and therefore to have been superior to monks. By contrast, Philaretus of Amnia was a married landowner who became the father-in-law of an emperor but nevertheless effected cures after his death.¹⁶⁵ Two further

162 Berger, *Life and Works*, 442.

163 Joseph van den Gheyn, "Vita S. Ioannicii auctore Petro," *Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, 11.1 (Brussels: 1894), ch. 35, 403F-404A.

164 Shevchenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period," 113–131; Auzépy, "Vies de saints iconoclastes," 57–67.

165 Marie-France Auzépy, "De Philarète, de sa famille, et de certains monastères de Constantinople," in *Les saints et leur sanctuaires à Byzance: Textes, images et monuments*, eds. Cathérine Jolivet-Levy, Michel Kaplan, and Pierre Sodini (Paris: 1993), 117–35.

texts suggest that Philaretus was not an exception.¹⁶⁶ The 10th-century *Life* of Callistus records that miracles happened at the tomb of the saint's father, a provincial aristocrat who lived during the Second Iconoclasm. Even more interesting is Philotheus of Opsikion who most likely also lived in the first half of the 9th century. A village priest, he married and had several children but was nevertheless a wonderworker already during his lifetime. According to his hagiographer, Philotheus' supernatural powers were the result of his extraordinary charity. This does, of course, not necessarily mean that Philotheus was an outspoken iconoclast. Indeed, one can argue that he was not perceived as an "iconoclast" saint because his cult continued into the 11th and 12th centuries. Nevertheless, it seems to be the case that the end of iconoclasm also spelt the end of the challenges to monasticism. In *Lives* dating to the later 9th and 10th centuries chastity is again a *conditio sine qua non* of sanctity.

166 Dirk Krausmüller, "Chastity or Procreation? Models of Sanctity for Byzantine Laymen During the Iconoclastic and Post-Iconoclastic Period," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 7 (2013), 49–68.

PART 5

Iconoclasm East and West



Images and Iconoclasm in Islam, ca. 600–850

Christian C. Sahner

1 Introduction

Early Islamic culture is sometimes described as “iconoclastic,” in the sense that it was given to destroying or defacing figural images. With few exceptions, however, this label is deeply misleading.¹ While iconoclasm flourished in the Byzantine Empire during the early medieval period, organized bouts of image destruction on the other side of the frontier were uncommon. Rather, what we find in early Islam is a general – but by no means universal – inclination towards the avoidance of figural imagery, especially in sacred contexts, not the active destruction thereof.²

In this essay, I wish to explore the history of images in early Islamic culture, as well as select instances in which individual Muslims or the Islamic state engaged in image destruction. In many ways, the debate over the permissibility of images was one defining question of early Islamic art. Although this art owed great debts to the civilizations that preceded it – especially the exuberantly figural cultures of Byzantium, Iran, Arabia, and Aksum – Islamic art distinguished itself by its interest in non-figural imagery and the primacy of the written word.

1 I would like to thank Tawfiq Da'adli, Greg Fisher, Sean Leatherbury, Robert Schick, Jack Tannous, and Alan Walmsley for their help in preparing this article. I am especially grateful to Barry Flood for his Slade Lectures at Oxford in Hilary Term 2019, entitled “Islam and Image: Beyond Aniconism and Iconoclasm.” They offered several helpful correctives while I was preparing this article, and I am grateful to Professor Flood for the chance to discuss some of his ideas in person. All remaining mistakes are my own.

This essay summarizes and expands on my previously published article, Christian C. Sahner, “The First Iconoclasm in Islam: A New History of the Edict of Yazid II (AH 104/AD 723),” *Der Islam* 94 (2017), 5–56.

2 For major introductions, see Henri Lammens, “L'attitude de l'Islam primitif en face des arts figurés,” *Journal asiatique* 6 (1915), 274–79; Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, “The Lawfulness of Painting in Early Islam,” *Ars Islamica* 11/12 (1946), 159–66; Oleg Grabar, “Islam and Iconoclasm,” in *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, eds. Anthony Bryer and Judith Herrin (Birmingham: 1977), 45–57; Jamal Elias, *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: 2012).

These developments in Islamic culture are often treated as a harbinger of debates about images in Byzantium. Indeed, scholars have long debated whether any links exist between Byzantine iconoclasm and Islam.³ The single most important event in this respect was the promulgation of an iconoclastic edict by the Caliph Yazīd (II) b. ʿAbd al-Malik in 723. The first and essentially only example of centrally-organized image destruction in early Islamic history, Yazīd's edict is difficult to understand and its impact on Byzantine politics and religion is even less clear. Yet in its own day, the edict was regarded as an inspiration for the policies of the iconoclast emperor Leo III (r. 717–741).

In the following pages, I would like to explore the history, context, and impact of the edict. Along the way, I would like to establish how Muslims arrived at a more coherent theory and law of images; the role of imperial ideology in the development of Islamic visual culture; the importance of context for the inclusion or exclusion of figural images in Islamic art; and the possible impact of Islamic legislation on disfigured church mosaics in the southern Levant. Nearly all of these questions are the subject of intense debate among historians. I will therefore strive to represent the contours of these debates as best I can before offering my own opinions on what may have happened.

2 The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the essential starting point for all Islamic law and theology, but it does not always provide clear advice on important issues, including the question of images. The Hebrew Bible, of course, contains extremely explicit passages about the permissibility of images, especially in religious contexts. As Exodus 20:4-5 puts it (cf. Deuteronomy 5:8-9):

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth below, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for

3 The literature on this topic is vast. See Carl Heinrich Becker, "Christliche Polemik und islamische Dogmenbildung," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* 26 (1912), 191–95; Gustave E. Von Grunebaum, "Byzantine Iconoclasm and the Influence of the Islamic Environment," *History of Religions* 2 (1962), 1–10; Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain: 1973), 59–84; Patricia Crone, "Islam, Judeo-Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), 59–95; Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850* (Cambridge: 2011), 105–17.

I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me.

The Qur'an constantly denounces the practice of idolatry (e.g. Q. *al-A'raf* 7:152, the story of the Golden Calf), though it expresses nothing with the force or decisiveness of the famous Biblical verses. Nor does it connect idolatry with a particular theory of images. The closest it comes is a series of exhortatory verses which warn the reader against revering "statues" (*aṣnām*) and "idols" (*awthān*) (e.g. Q. *al-Mā'ida* 5:90, *al-Ḥajj* 22:30).⁴

Although a Biblical-style prohibition may be missing from the Qur'an, it imparts an implicit lesson about graven images through stories about the patriarch Abraham. According to the account in Q. *al-Anbiyā'* 21:52–58:

[Abraham] said to his father and his people, "What are these images (Ar. *al-tamāthīl*) to which you are so devoted?" They replied, "We found our fathers worshipping them." He said, "You and your fathers have clearly gone astray ... By God I shall certainly outwit your idols as soon as you have turned your backs!" He broke them all into pieces [...]

Such stories shaped how later generations of Muslims conceived of idols and the need to demolish them. We see this especially in stories of how Muḥammad cleansed the Ka'ba of its idols after the conquest of Mecca.⁵

Of course, hostility towards idols tells us nothing about the Qur'an's view of images more broadly. Indeed, nothing in the Qur'an prohibits the display of images as such, provided they are not worshipped or honored (e.g. Q. *Saba'* 34:13, where the jinn of Solomon are said to make *tamāthīl*). Sadly, the text contains few comments on images beyond concerns about polytheism (*shirk*), and thus, the passages have often been taken as representative of the Qur'an's views of figural representation in the abstract. As we shall see, however, the prohibition on figural imagery for which Islam became famous arose due to developments in the 8th century and beyond – rather than from the Qur'an itself. Indeed, the absence of a clear directive about figural imagery may have contributed to a diversity of practices on the ground in the early post-conquest era.

4 Daniel J. Sahas, "Iconoclasm," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: 2002), ii, 473–75; Gerald R. Hawting, "Idolatry and Idolaters," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ii, 475–80; Gerald R. Hawting, "Idols and Images," *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ii, 481–83.

5 Suliman Bashear, "The Images of Mecca: A Case-Study in Early Muslim Iconography," *Le Muséon* 105 (1992), 361–77.

3 Islamic Coins of the 7th Century

Art historical evidence for the 7th century is somewhat patchy, as very few objects and no architecture survives from before the 690s.⁶ There is one body of evidence, however, which is both substantial in size and suggestive of early Islamic attitudes towards images, and these are the coins minted across the caliphate during the mid- to late-7th century. What is distinctive about these “pre-reform” coins, as they are known, is that they often incorporate the iconography of the Arabs’ vanquished foes. Thus, coins from greater Syria frequently feature imperial portraits emulating those found on Byzantine coins (Figures 11.1–11.2).⁷ In some cases, Islamic coins even recycled Christian iconography, including images of the cross. Although the quality of the minting could be visibly lower than that of the pre-conquest period, these “Islamic” coins shared much in common with their Byzantine models. Something similar unfolded in the Iranian world.⁸ There, the Arabs minted coins with iconography borrowed from the Sasanians, including portraits of the king of kings and the Zoroastrian fire altar (Figures 11.3–11.4). The only explicitly Islamic addition to these coins was the *basmala* (“in the name of God”), inscribed in discreet Arabic letters below the royal image.

What was the logic behind this curious mixture of Byzantine, Sasanian, and Islamic elements? After all, was it not in the interest of the conquerors to differentiate themselves politically and religiously from the regimes they had toppled? Did the new Muslim rulers not regard Christian and Zoroastrian imagery as profane? Here, it seems that Muslims relied on older late antique models for several reasons. For one, they were still negotiating the frontiers between themselves and the communities they had conquered. As the research of Fred Donner and others has shown, Muslims in this period were open to the presence of non-Muslim cultures to a far greater extent than they would become in later periods, especially when it came to appropriating non-Muslim beliefs

6 Jeremy Johns, “Archaeology and the History of Early Islam: The First Seventy Years,” *The Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46 (2003), 411–36.

7 Clive Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins: An Introduction, with a Catalogue of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* (Washington, DC: 2008). For discussion of this iconography, see Luke Treadwell, “Symbolism and Meaning on the Early Islamic Copper Coinage of Greater Syria,” in *Coinage and History in the Seventh-Century Near East, Vol. 4*, ed. Wolfgang Schulze (London: 2015), 73–95, esp. 76–8 for the little-known “Enthroned Emperor type of Damascus” (ca. early 60s AH), which features no fewer than four crosses.

8 John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum: A Catalogue of the Arab-Sasanian Coins* (London: 1941).



FIGURE 11.1 Arab-Byzantine coin, obverse, Baysān, 55–70 AH / 675–90 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



FIGURE 11.2 Arab-Byzantine coin, Baysān, reverse, 55–70 AH / 675–90 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

and symbols.⁹ The second reason is related to the first, though much more pragmatic: the conquerors realized that by employing the iconography of their

⁹ Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: 2010); also Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: 2019).



FIGURE 11.3 Arab-Sasanian coin, Kirmān, obverse, 58 AH / 678-79 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



FIGURE 11.4 Arab-Sasanian coin, Kirmān, reverse, 58 AH / 678-79 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

vanquished foes, they could represent themselves as their imperial heirs. For a young movement like Islam, which lacked deep roots in the societies it now ruled, to wrap oneself in the symbolism of infidel kings was to lay claim to their imperial legacy, and indeed, to exceed it.

We can catch a glimpse of these dynamics in a famous passage from a Syriac text of the seventh century known as *The Maronite Chronicle*. In it, we read how the first Umayyad Caliph Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 661–80) “[...] minted gold and silver, but it was not accepted, because it had no cross on it.”¹⁰ The Christian inhabitants of Syria had lived for generations with Byzantine coins bearing images of the cross. Indeed, it seems that Mu'āwiya initially removed the cross, but as a result, the population rejected his coins as legal tender. Clearly, his non-Muslim subjects had specific expectations of how their money should look, and this was connected to the kinds of symbols rulers were supposed to display.

Not only did the Umayyads mint coins mimicking the currencies of the Byzantines and Sasanians, but in the last decades of the 7th century, they also minted coins with their own distinctively Islamic imagery. Here, the “pre-reform” coins of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 685–705) are among the most revealing. One such example is the so-called “standing caliph” issue, the earliest of which dates to 693–94 (Figures 11.5–11.6).¹¹ On one side, it features a full-body portrait of a bearded man in a robe, holding a sword across his body. This is usually thought to represent ‘Abd al-Malik. On the other side is a curious image of a pole atop a stepped base, usually interpreted as an effort to “Islamicize” the cross found on Byzantine coins of the period (sans the horizontal element).¹² Scholars have argued that this coin was a visual expression of the rivalry between ‘Abd al-Malik and his Byzantine contemporary Justinian II (r. 685–95, 705–11), who was minting novel coins of his own at this time. These featured a forward-facing bust of Christ Pantokrator on one side and a full-length portrait of the emperor on the other, as well as an image of a cross and stepped base. Through these examples, we see how images were an

10 Andrew Palmer (trans.), *The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: 1993), 32.

11 Stephen Album and Tony Goodwin, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean, Volume 1, The Pre-Reform Coinage of the Early Islamic Period* (Oxford: 2002), plates 41–46; on the debate over whether this represents ‘Abd al-Malik or the Prophet Muḥammad himself, see Treadwell, “Symbolism and Meaning,” 86–93.

12 Others have suggested that it may not be a modified Christian symbol at all, but a fully Islamic one; e.g. the *qutb*, or celestial pole: Nadia Jamil, “Caliph and Qutb: Poetry as a Source for Interpreting the Transformation of the Byzantine Cross on Steps on Umayyad Coins,” in *Bayt al-Maqdis, Jerusalem and Early Islam*, ed. Jeremy Johns (Oxford: 1999), 7–57; or the spear (Ar. *ʿanaza*) of the Prophet, see Luke Treadwell, “Mihrab and ‘Anaza’ or ‘Sacrum and Spear’? A Reconsideration of an Early Marwanid Silver Drachm,” *Muqarnas* 22 (2005), 1–28.



FIGURE 11.5 Standing-caliph coin, Ḥimṣ, obverse, 70-77 AH/ 690-97 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

important expression of the geopolitical rivalry between the two great powers of the 7th-century Near East.¹³

What happened next is even more suggestive of the turn toward non-figural imagery. Shortly after issuing the “standing caliph” dirham, ‘Abd al-Malik banished figural imagery from his currency altogether. In place of the old Byzantine and Sasanian iconography, he inscribed dense lines of Arabic text. The legends on these gold, silver, and copper coins became standard throughout the Umayyad period and beyond (Figures 11.7-11.8). The obverse included a variation of the Muslim profession of faith, “There is no god but God, He has no associate” (*lā ilāha illā ‘llāh lā sharīka lahu*). The reverse featured a quotation from Q. *al-Ikhlāṣ* 112, “God is one God, the eternal, He did not beget and He was not begotten, there is none like unto Him.” A marginal inscription on the obverse also stated, “Muḥammad is the messenger of God; [God] sent him with guidance and the true religion, to exalt it over every other religion” (cf. Q. *al-Tawba* 9:33, *al-Fatḥ* 48:28, *al-Ṣaff* 61:9).¹⁴ With these brief lines, ‘Abd al-Malik

13 Luke Treadwell, “Byzantium and Islam in the Late 7th Century AD: A ‘Numismatic War of Images,’” in *Arab-Byzantine Coins and History*, ed. Tony Goodwin (London: 2012), 145–56; Michael Humphreys, “The ‘War of Images’ Revisited: Justinian II’s Coinage Reform and the Caliphate,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 173 (2013), 229–44.

14 Norman D. Nicol, *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean, Volume 2, Early Post-Reform Coinage* (Oxford: 2009); more generally, Clive Foss, “Coinage from the First Century of Islam,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 16 (2003), 748–60. For a fascinating transitional



FIGURE 11.6 Standing-caliph coin, Ḥimṣ, reverse, 70–77 AH/ 690–97 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

drew a clear boundary between the identity of the caliphate and the empires that had preceded it. What is more, by so bluntly emphasizing monotheism in this way, he drew a clear line between Islam and the competing religions of the late antique Near East, particularly Christianity.

4 Marwānīd Sanctuaries and the Rivalry with Christianity

Coins were not the only manifestations of this new aniconic turn. Around the same time as ‘Abd al-Malik was removing figural imagery from his coins, several imperial sanctuaries were erected which also avoided images of men and animals. The most famous of these are still standing today: the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, completed under the patronage of ‘Abd al-Malik in 691–92, and the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, completed under the patronage of his son al-Walīd (I) b. ‘Abd al-Malik between 705 and 715. Much as with the “post-reform” coins, we can interpret these structures as manifestations of a visual competition between Islam and Christianity, since both were erected in direct or implicit opposition to existing Christian buildings.

coin, in which we find a Sasanian royal portrait on one side paired with the Muslim profession of faith (Ar. *shahāda*) in Pahlavi on the other, see Malek Iradj Mochiri, “A Pahlavi Forerunner of the Umayyad Reformed Coinage,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1981), 168–72.



FIGURE 11.7 Post-reform aniconic coin, Damascus, obverse, 78 AH / 697-98 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



FIGURE 11.8 Post-reform aniconic coin, Damascus, reverse, 78 AH / 697-98 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The Dome of the Rock was built atop the Temple Mount, which had lain bare since the Roman emperor Titus destroyed the Jewish sanctuary there in 70 A.D. Since then, Jerusalem came to be dominated by another domed shrine across town, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Dome of the Rock thus

inserted itself into a charged landscape dominated by the rivalry between the two older monotheisms. The interior of ‘Abd al-Malik’s sanctuary underlined its implicit challenge above all to Christianity. Decorated with lush non-figural mosaics, the Dome of the Rock featured a long Arabic inscription attacking Christians for their belief in the divinity of Jesus. Thus, in a single monument, ‘Abd al-Malik challenged the supremacy of his rival religions in Jerusalem *and* used the visual power of the Arabic text to announce Islam as the new dominant faith.¹⁵

Something similar unfolded in Damascus. There, al-Walīd demolished the Byzantine church of St. John the Baptist – which Muslims and Christians had used jointly for prayer since the time of the conquest – and replaced it with a sparkling imperial mosque. As with the Dome of the Rock, the Umayyad Mosque was decorated with mosaics executed in the late antique style (Figure 11.9). And much like the Dome of the Rock, these mosaics were adamantly non-figural. In the place of Biblical narratives and imperial portraits, such as those found in Byzantine churches, the Umayyad Mosque was decorated with scenes of paradise devoid of any trace of human or animal life. Once again, the turn away from figural images announced Islam’s arrival as an imperial faith and the chief rival to Christianity.¹⁶

Monuments were not the only battlegrounds in this contest. Indeed, narrative sources discuss episodes of violence against Christian symbols during the 7th and early 8th century, and these seem to reflect the general souring of relations between the two communities. For example, several Christian sources state that the Jews asked the Caliph ‘Umar (I) b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634–44) to remove a cross from the Mount of Olives.¹⁷ The *History of the Patriarchs*

15 Oleg Grabar, *The Shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton: 1996); and various articles in Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (eds.), *Bayt al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem* (Oxford: 1992). For the inscription, see esp. Christel Kessler, “‘Abd al-Malik’s Inscription in the Dome of the Rock,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 1 (1970), 2–14.

16 Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden: 2001); Alain Fouad George, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Art, Faith and Empire in Early Islam* (London: 2021). Later medieval sources report that the Dome of the Rock also contained paintings perhaps not unlike the mosaics found in the Damascus; these included images of the Straight Path (Ar. *al-ṣirāt*), the Gate of Paradise, and Valley of Gehenna: Amikam Elad, “Why did ‘Abd al-Malik Build the Dome of the Rock? A Re-Examination of the Muslim Sources,” in *Bayt al-Maqdis: ‘Abd al-Malik’s Jerusalem*, eds. Julian Raby and Jeremy Johns (Oxford: 1992), 46, 51–52.

17 Including Theophanes: Carolus de Boor, *Theophanis chronographia* (Leipzig: 1883–85), I, 342 (Gk.); Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, A.D. 284–813* (Oxford: 1997), 476 (Eng.); see Sahner, “First Iconoclasm in Islam,” 25.



FIGURE 11.9 Mosaics, Umayyad Mosque of Damascus, ca. 86-96/705-15

IMAGE: CHRISTIAN C. SAHNER

of *Alexandria*, a Christian Arabic text, reports that the Umayyad prince al-Aṣḡagh b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz spat on an icon of the Virgin at Ḥulwān in Egypt.¹⁸ If such anecdotes are true, they seem to reflect a world in which the cross and the icon were emerging as major points of contention between Christians and Muslims. Indeed, the cross features prominently in early Christian polemical texts, written in Syriac and Arabic between the 8th and 10th centuries with the goal of refuting Islam.¹⁹ It is no surprise that the cross emerged as a locus of disagreement, given the two religions’ divergent views of Christ’s divinity and resurrection. It is also no surprise given that the cross was such a prominent public symbol of Christianity, and as such, dominated the visual landscape of the late antique Near East. Reflecting this social reality, the Pact of ‘Umar (*‘ahd ‘umar, al-shurūṭ al-‘umariyya*), the quasi-canonical laws governing relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, prohibited the display of the cross and

18 B. Evetts (ed.), “History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, III: Agatho to Michael I (766),” *Patrologia Orientalis* 5 (1910), 52 (306), cf. 149–50, 403–4, in which a Muslim attempts to deface an image of the crucified Jesus.

19 See now Charles Tieszen, *Cross Veneration in the Medieval Islamic World: Christian Identity and Practice under Muslim Rule* (London: 2017).

other Christian symbols.²⁰ To claim the public sphere for Islam was thus to purge it of overt Christian influence.

5 The Iconoclastic Edict of Yazīd

The foregoing sets the stage for one of the most important – and hotly debated – instances of iconoclasm in early Islamic history: the edict of the Caliph Yazīd II in 723. The edict has captured the attention of historians for two main reasons. First, it has often been interpreted as a harbinger of the Islamic doctrine of images in later periods, when jurists and transmitters of *ḥadīth* inveighed against images. Second, the edict has been treated as a possible inspiration for iconoclasm inside the Byzantine Empire. While both matters are of great importance, the intense focus on these questions to the exclusion of others has meant that the edict has rarely been interpreted on its own terms. In the following section, let us examine the edict as a discrete moment in early Islamic history then consider its possible impact in the archaeological record.²¹

Part of the controversy surrounding the edict of Yazīd is the complex, often contradictory nature of the written sources. This evidence comes from a range of chronicles, along with a smaller number of apocalyptic texts, composed in Syriac, Greek, Latin, Armenian, and Arabic. Many of these texts were written within the caliphate itself, while others originated in areas outside Islamic control, especially Byzantium. Failure to analyze the full breadth of these sources has led many scholars to question whether the edict ever actually happened. Yet as we shall see, this view is mistaken.²²

The earliest source which discusses the edict is the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, written in Syriac in Northern Mesopotamia around 775, more than fifty years after

20 For this clause in an early recension of the Pact of ‘Umar, see Ibn Sammāk, *Juz’ fihi shurūṭ amīr al-mu’minīn ‘umar b. al-khaṭṭāb raḍī allāh ‘anhu ‘alā l-naṣārā*, ed. Nizām Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Ya’qūbī (Beirut: 2001), 26.

21 For an overview of the edict, see Sahner, “First Iconoclasm in Islam”; plus Alexander A. Vasiliev, “The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721,” *DOP* 9/10 (1956), 23–47; Mattia Guidetti, “L’Editto di Yazid II: Immagini e identità religiosa nel Bilad al-Sham dell’VIII secolo,” in *L’VIII secolo: Un secolo inquieto; Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi. Cividale del Friuli, 4–7 dicembre 2008*, ed. Valentino Pace (Friuli: 2010), 69–79.

22 Sahner, “First Iconoclasm in Islam,” 10–19. For skeptical views of the written sources, see Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, trans. Margaret Graham (London: 1927), 324–25; Grabar, “Islam and Iconoclasm,” 46; Adnan Shiyab, *Der Islam und der Bilderstreit in Jordanien und Palästina* (Munich: 2006), 224–25; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 105–117; now Daniel Reynolds, “Rethinking Palestinian Iconoclasm,” *DOP* 71 (2017), 1–63, esp. 5, 7, 58.

the events allegedly took place.²³ Along with this, some of the most detailed evidence comes from Byzantine Greek sources, beginning with the *Acts of the Council of Nicaea* in 787, which restored the veneration of images inside the empire.²⁴ Despite the abundant information they impart, the Greek sources are deeply colored by the agenda of their authors, namely, fierce iconodules who were determined to condemn iconoclasm inside Byzantium by tethering it to the supposed actions of a heretical Muslim ruler outside the empire. Indeed, many of the sources claim that Yazīd acted under the influence of a Jewish magician named Tessarakontapechys, who after persuading the caliph to issue a decree, fled to Isauria, whence his ideas spread to Constantinople.²⁵ While not wishing to discount this anecdote altogether – for it finds a curious echo in an Islamic chronicle of the period²⁶ – it is important to read Byzantine accounts of Yazīd's reign through the prism of iconodule theology and politics. By contrast, Armenian sources about the edict are not particularly abundant or detailed, but they do provide independent confirmation of Yazīd's actions from outside the Byzantine tradition.²⁷ For this reason they – along with the Syriac sources, which emanate from another Miaphysite Christian milieu – are extremely important.

The most contested and misunderstood body of evidence about Yazīd's iconoclasm is in Arabic. Some historians have wrongly assumed that no Arabic sources for the edict exist, while others have downplayed the significance of the ones that do. On the basis of this, they have questioned whether Yazīd's iconoclasm happened at all. While this view is unfounded, what is true is that none of the mainstream Arabic Islamic sources that historians usually consult mention the edict (e.g. the chronicles of Khalifa b. Khayyāt, al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī, al-Ya'qūbī, and others). Instead, what survives is in some ways more

23 Jean-Baptiste Chabot (ed.), *Chronicon anonymum Pseudo-Dionysianum vulgo dictum* (Louvain: 1949–89), ii, 163–16 (Syr.); Amir Harrak (trans.), *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV, A.D. 488–775* (Toronto: 1999), 155–56 (Eng.).

24 J. D. Mansi, ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection* (Paris: 1758–1798), xiii, cols. 195–200 (Gk.); John Mendham (trans.), *The Seventh General Council, the Second of Nicaea, Held A.D. 787, in which the Worship of Images Was Established* (London: 1849), 294–97 (Eng.).

25 Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III*, 59–84; generally Paul Speck, *Ich bin's nicht, Kaiser Konstantin ist es gewesen: Die Legenden vom Einfluss des Teufels, des Juden und des Moslem auf den Ikonoklasmus* (Bonn: 1990).

26 See al-Ṭabarī, *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabarī*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, 15 vols. in 3 parts (Leiden: 1879–1901), ii, 1463–64, which does not mention Yazīd's decree, but does mention a Jewish adviser named “Abū Māwiya (sic).”

27 For the earliest Armenian source, see Zaven Arzoumanian (trans.), *History of Lewond the Eminent Vardapet of the Armenians* (Wynnewood, PA: 1982), 104 (Eng.).

interesting: a collection of reports from Muslim and Christian chronicles from Egypt, along with a series of Muslim and Christian apocalyptic texts that indirectly allude to Yazīd's actions.²⁸

Along with the written sources, there exists possible archaeological evidence in the form of disfigured mosaics from ruined churches, synagogues, and Islamic palaces scattered across the southern Levant. As we shall see, however, these mosaics are extremely hard to interpret and may have been damaged by a range of causes, not only Umayyad legislation.

What do the written sources tell us about the caliph's iconoclastic campaign?²⁹ Despite their geographic and linguistic diversity, they furnish a remarkably consistent picture of what happened. In nearly every text, Yazīd is portrayed as the primary instigator of the edict (though the Byzantine sources allege that he was acting under the influence of a Jewish adviser). That it was a real piece of legislation is implied by several different texts, which refer to it as a "command" (Syr. *fūqdānā*), a "general letter" (Gk. *egkuklion epistolēn*), a "universal edict" (Gk. *dogma katholikon*), and a "written order" (Ar. *kitāb*). Yazīd entrusted the implementation of the law to several deputies, including his half-brother, the famous general Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik (d. 738), various "agents," "amīrs with the Arabs," and Jews.

Yazīd was concerned primarily (but not exclusively) with churches and other Christian buildings, but several sources also state that "homes" were attacked. The Muslim authorities were mainly interested in images of living beings. The sources drive home this point by using terms such as "representations" and "likenesses" (Gk. *homoiōma*, Ar. *tamāthīl*) for the targeted objects. This may reflect specifically Muslim concerns about images thought to be endowed with "spirit" (Ar. *rūh*), which we shall discuss later. The list of destroyed objects included statues, books, liturgical vessels, vestments, images on walls, and mosaics. Some objects were made of stone, while others were made of wood, ivory, and bronze. Although not an image as such, crosses were also reportedly damaged. The umbrella terms for these objects is quite broad: the Syriac sources speak of *šūrātā* and *šalmē*; the Greek sources of *eikones* and *charaktēres*; and the Arabic sources of *šūwar*, *aṣnām*, and *tamāthīl*.

Many historians have concluded that Yazīd's law mainly targeted Christians. This seems likely to me as well, but there is overlooked evidence in the Arabic

28 For a complete list of Arabic sources, written by both Muslims (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, al-Kindī, Ibn Taghribirdī, al-Maqrīzī, Nu'aym b. Ḥammād) and Christians (*The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, *The Proto-Fourteenth Vision of Daniel*), see Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 15–19.

29 For the following paragraph, see Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 19–20, 24–25.

sources to suggest that Muslim objects were targeted, too.³⁰ The earliest such reference appears in Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Conquest of Egypt (Futūḥ miṣr)*, which mentions Yazīd's edict in a passage concerning an early governor of Egypt named 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān (d. 85/704; the father of the aforementioned al-Aṣḥab who spat on an icon at Ḥulwān):

The bath which is known today as the Bath of Abū Murra was originally a property (*khiṭṭatan*) belonging to a man from (the tribe of) Tanūkh, and he is Jadd b. 'Alqama or his father. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Marwān asked him (to give it to him), so he gave it to him, and he built there a bath for Zabbān b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, which is still known (by the name) of Zabbān. A poet said the following regarding it:

*He who is pure of heart, Let him become even purer in the bath of Zabbān
It possesses no spirit, and no lip may kiss it, But it is only a statue of man's
creation*

In the bath was a statue of marble (*ṣanamun min rukhāmin*) in the shape of a woman, which was a great marvel until it was destroyed in the year in which Yazīd b. 'Abd al-Malik ordered the destruction of statues (*al-aṣnām*). He ordered their destruction in the year 102/720–21.³¹

The anecdote, which appears in several other Egyptian sources, suggests that the statue was famous in Fustāt, where the baths of Zabbān were apparently located. Statues such as this were common in bath houses of the early Islamic period. Often they were reused pieces of classical statuary, and not surprisingly, they provoked the ire of prudish Muslim scholars, including the great jurist and rigorist of the early 'Abbasid period, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855).³²

The date of the edict is also a matter of dispute. The sources provide conflicting information about this, with many suggesting that it was promulgated in 721, near the beginning of Yazīd's reign. In my opinion, however, this is mistaken, as it seems that the edict was issued in 723, not long before Yazīd's death.

30 Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 20–23.

31 Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *The History of the Conquest of Egypt, North Africa, and Spain, known as the Futūḥ Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam*, ed. Charles Torrey (New Haven: 1922), 113–14; this corrects the translation of the passage given in Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 20–21.

32 Hana Taragan, "A Matter of Looking: The Female Images in the Umayyad Palace at Khirbat al-Maḥjar," in *The Metamorphosis of Marginal Images: From Antiquity to Present Time*, eds. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar and Asher Ovadia (Tel Aviv: 2001), 69–77; for Ibn Ḥanbal, see Ibn Qudāma, *al-Mughnī li-ibn qudāma*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (Cairo: 1948), vii, 10. For evidence of image destruction at the Muslim-controlled baths of Hammat Gader, see below n. 57–58.

The very earliest source about the edict – the aforementioned *Chronicle of Zuqnān* – places it in 723. This date also seems plausible on the basis of the telling detail in the *Chronicle of Theophanes* that the decree failed to attract attention because Yazīd died shortly after issuing it. If this is true, it may explain the silence of the mainstream Arabic sources, which may have failed to mention the law because it was in effect so briefly.³³

It can be difficult to appreciate just how aberrant Yazīd's actions were in his own day, a generation before a consensus against images had formed among most Muslim jurists and *ḥadīth* transmitters. Yet we must remember that Yazīd was the only pre-modern Muslim ruler to order the destruction of figural art in such an organized fashion. What is more, it is telling that his half-brother and successor, Hishām (I) b. 'Abd al-Malik (r. 724–43), revoked the edict as soon as Yazīd had died. In other words, there was nothing ordinary about the caliph's actions. They were extraordinary and deserve to be understood as such. What prompted him to do such a strange thing?

One possibility is that the iconoclastic edict emerged as part of a broader spectrum of anti-Christian legislation at the time. The 710s and 720s were a period of intense experimentation and debate about the treatment of non-Muslims. Some laws promulgated by Yazīd and his predecessor 'Umar II find echoes in later *dhimmī* codes. These include prohibitions on Christians giving testimony against Muslims, holding positions of political power, striking the *nāqūs* (a wooden board beaten to summon the faithful to prayer), raising their voices in prayer, and wearing distinguishing articles of clothing allowed only to Muslims. At the same time, the reign of Yazīd witnessed other anti-Christian decrees which find no echoes in later legal sources. These include strange orders to slaughter particular types of animals (variously, white dogs, white doves, white cocks, pigs) and people (with blue eyes). The most famous of these aberrant laws was the iconoclastic edict itself. None of this legislation survived Yazīd's reign and none of it passed into the mainstream of later *dhimmī* codes, such as the so-called Pact of 'Umar. Could we be looking at a failed experiment regarding the proper treatment of Christians?³⁴

Yazīd's iconoclasm also occurred against the backdrop of increasingly strained relations between the Muslim ruling minority and the Christian demographic majority in the old Byzantine provinces of the caliphate. The strain manifested itself in the more brazenly Islamic style of rule employed by 'Abd al-Malik and his successors, the increasingly public displays of Islamic

33 Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 25–27.

34 Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 27–34.

faith in the great sanctuaries of Jerusalem and Damascus, the proclamation of Islamic doctrines in the new aniconic coins, and the possibly mounting pace of conversion. All of this signals a wider effort to marginalize Christianity and promote Islam, and the iconoclastic campaign may have been part of this turn.³⁵

Another possibility is that Yazīd wished to be seen as adhering to the expectations of certain pious constituents at court. Indeed, it may not be a coincidence that the edict appeared shortly after the passage of the first Islamic century. This was a date charged with apocalyptic significance for many Muslims and may have contributed to the major decision to besiege Constantinople in 717-18, an event remembered as having eschatological significance in early *ḥadīths*. Indeed, it may be no coincidence that the Umayyad general who led the siege of Constantinople, the aforementioned Maslama b. ‘Abd al-Malik, reportedly spearheaded the implementation of Yazīd’s edict only a few years later.³⁶

Perhaps Yazīd was moved by a desire to purge what he perceived as “idolatry” from his realm. Further hints of this come from parallels between some of Yazīd’s more bizarre actions (mentioned above) and predictions about the end times in Muslim apocalyptic literature.³⁷ What is more, several Islamic and Christian apocalyptic texts seem to mention iconoclasm in connection with Yazīd. The *Book of Tribulations* (*Kitāb al-ḥitan*) of Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād (d. 843), for example, features a list of Muslim rulers, including an unnamed caliph who is described as follows:

After him shall reign the braggart, the demolisher of the building, and the destroyer of the images (*al-ṣalīf ḥādīm al-bunyān wa-mughayyir al-suwar*). His life shall last for three weeks and a third of a week.³⁸

Given the ruler’s description and his position in the list, some historians have surmised that the “destroyer of the images” is none other than Yazīd. If this is true, it is revealing that iconoclasm was remembered as the defining event of his short reign and one closely associated with the end of days.

35 Sahner, “First Iconoclasm in Islam,” 36–38.

36 Finbarr Barry Flood, “Faith, Religion, and the Material Culture of Early Islam,” in *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th-9th Century*, eds. Helen C. Evans with Brandie Ratliff (New York and New Haven: 2012), here: 255.

37 Sahner, “First Iconoclasm in Islam,” 34–35.

38 Nu‘aym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-ḥitan*, ed. Majdī Maṣṣūr b. Sayyid al-Shūrī (Beirut, 1997), 477.



FIGURE 11.10 Disfigured mosaic, Church of St. Stephen, Umm al-Raṣāṣ, Jordan; mosaics first installed 718

IMAGE: CHRISTIAN C. SAHNER

6 Iconoclastic Mosaics

As mentioned above, many scholars writing about Umayyad iconoclasm have posited a connection between Yazīd's decree and the large body of disfigured floor mosaics found in churches across the southern Levant, whose damage seems to date to the 8th century. As the research of Daniel Reynolds and others has shown, eighty-seven such churches have been found as of 2015.³⁹ The

39 The literature on the damaged mosaics is extensive. This summary draws on Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," though also see Robert Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule: A Historical and Archaeological Study* (Princeton: 1995), 180–219; Michele Piccirillo, "Iconofobia o iconoclastia nella chiesa di Giordania?" in *Bisanzio e l'Occidente: Arte, archeologia, storia: Studi in onore di Fernanda de' Maffei*, eds. Claudia Barsanti et al. (Rome: 1996), 173–91; Susanna Ognibene, "The Iconophobic Dossier," in *Mount Nebo: New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, eds. Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata (Jerusalem: 1998), i, 372–89; eadem, *Umm al-Rasas: La chiesa di Santo Stefano ed il "problema iconofobico"* (Rome: 2002), 467–85; Robert Schick, "The Destruction of Images in 8th-Century Palestine," in *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York and New Haven: 2015), 132–41.



FIGURE 11.11 Disfigured mosaic, Acropolis Church, Ma'in, Jordan; mosaics first installed 719–20

IMAGE: SEAN LEATHERBURY/ MANAR AL-ATHAR, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

damage varies widely from one site to the next, though the phenomenon follows several predictable patterns. The iconoclasts focused on images of living beings, including people and animals (Figures 11.10–11.11). By contrast, they left intact images of plants, cities, flowers, and inanimate objects. With respect to technique, the iconoclasts typically removed tesserae and scrambled them into abstract fields, preserving the outline of the originals. Sometimes, they removed faces and torsos but maintained the rest of the body. In rare instances, depictions of humans and animals were replaced by new images of plants or inanimate objects. Despite the disfiguring, there was nothing indiscriminate about the damage itself: more often than not, the iconoclasts worked carefully and deliberately, leaving behind smooth mosaic fields rather than jagged borders or other hallmarks of a hasty, violent operation.

It is not clear when this phenomenon began. Nearly all of the churches affected by iconoclasm were standing by the end of the sixth century, providing a useful *terminus ante quem* for the damage. Likewise, the last dated evidence of iconoclasm comes from 762, an equally useful *terminus post quem*. The real question is what happened in between, and here, it is impossible to tell exactly when the damage took place for most sites. There is strong evidence, however, that most of the iconoclastic activity began during the 720s, around Yazīd's time in power.

The geographic range of the damage is also difficult to decipher. The vast majority (77 per cent of Reynolds' corpus) exists in what is today Jordan, with a strong concentration in the north and west of the country around Jerash, Pella, Amman, and the Madaba Plains. There is a smaller though still significant number of sites located on the other side of the River Jordan, southwest of Jerusalem. The northernmost site with iconoclastic damage is at Nabgha in northern Syria, though it is such a geographic outlier that it should not be treated as representative of the corpus as a whole. The southern-most site is at Jabal Hārūn near Petra; the easternmost site at Khirbat al-Samrā', near the modern Syrian-Jordanian border; and the westernmost sites lie along the Mediterranean at Caesarea and Jabāliyyā. Much of the damage occurred within the old Byzantine provinces of Arabia and Palaestina, which overlap with the new Umayyad administrative districts (Ar. *ajnād*) of Dimashq, al-Urdunn, and Filasṭīn. Most of the damage occurred at rural, rather than urban sites.

These are the general contours of the damage, but what connection does it have to Umayyad iconoclasm? Here, there are two main views in the scholarly literature. The first is expressed most recently and clearly by Reynolds, who argues that Palestinian iconoclasm was an internal Christian affair; that it was concentrated among Chalcedonian communities tied to the Jerusalem patriarchate; and that it had little connection to Islamic legal, social, or theological pressures.⁴⁰ Specifically, Reynolds has argued against any relationship between the damaged mosaics and Yazīd's decree. He has done so on the basis of what he regards as the dubious literary sources for the edict, the preponderance of iconoclasm in rural settlements on the edge of caliphal authority, the absence of iconoclasm in areas close to the centers of Islamic power, and the fact that some of the iconoclasm may be dated to periods after Yazīd's reign (e.g. the site

40 See especially the summary comments in Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 1–5, 57–62; for another recent argument against Umayyad involvement, see Finbarr Barry Flood, "Christian Mosaics in Early Islamic Jordan and Palestine: A Case of Regional Iconoclasm," in *Age of Transition: Byzantine Culture in the Islamic World*, ed. Helen C. Evans (New York and New Haven: 2015), 117.

of Jabāliyā in Gaza, whose mosaics were disfigured sometime after they were first lain in 732).⁴¹ Instead, Reynolds has argued that Palestinian iconoclasm reflected debates about images and idolatry within local networks of bishops, which can be reconstructed partly using epigraphic evidence from the damaged floors.

In my view, Reynolds is correct in saying that Yazīd's decree cannot account for all the damage in the archaeological record: it is simply too varied in date and location to claim that all of it derives from the actions of just one man. But I do believe there is compelling evidence to suggest that Yazīd may have contributed to it in part. Here we arrive at the second major interpretation in the scholarly literature – represented recently by the work of G.W. Bowersock and myself – which sees Islamic policies and attitudes as having a direct influence on the archaeological record, even if the mechanics and timing of this influence are unclear.⁴² A major issue with Reynolds' argument is that he too hastily dismisses the literary sources for Yazīd's edict. As we have seen, while the sources are not unproblematic, they come from a far wider array of linguistic, geographic, and confessional backgrounds (including Islamic) than Reynolds and other skeptics have hitherto acknowledged.⁴³ Seen as a whole, they give the impression that Yazīd's edict was real and left an enduring impact on the historical memory of many communities across the Middle East.

Another problem with Reynolds' argument is the geographic distribution of the damage. Reynolds assumes that because the damage occurred far away from what he regards as the centers of Umayyad power – presumably what is

41 Jean-Baptiste Humbert, "The Rivers of Paradise in the Byzantine Church near Jabaliyah-Gaza," in *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897–1997: Traveling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period*, ed. Michele Piccirillo (Jerusalem: 1999), 216–18; Émilie Merlet, "Les mosaïques du complexe ecclésiastique de Mikheitem à Jabāliyah (Territoire de Gaza)," in *XII Colloquio AIEMA, Venezia 11–15 settembre 2012* (Venice: 2015), 289–95. The dating of the iconoclasm at this site requires further analysis, as the inscriptional evidence remains unpublished in satisfactory fashion. The inscription of 732, located in the central nave, is but one of several dated inscriptions found throughout the complex, some from as early as the 5th century. Future research should seek to clarify the relationship between iconoclasm, the various mosaic floors, and their dates.

42 Glen Bowersock, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, MA: 2006), 99–111; Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 38–42.

43 To provide one example of how Reynolds underestimates the textual evidence, he notes: "Nowhere in the reports of the 'Edict of Yazid' does the tradition explicitly identify the medium of images that were targeted for removal" ("Palestinian Iconoclasm," 7), but this is plainly not true (see above and Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 19–20, in which "mosaic" is enumerated among the objects affected by the damage: i.e. Mansi, *Collectio*, xiii, col. 197d).

today southern Syria – this damage could not have been caused by Yazīd.⁴⁴ But we know that as prince and later as caliph, Yazīd was based not in Damascus, but in northwestern Transjordan. Three sites are significant in this respect. The first is the region around Capitolias (Ar. Bayt Rās), where Yazīd lived and where he eventually died. The second is Amman itself, where Yazīd had a role in the construction of the congregational mosque. The third is the steppe region south of Amman known as the Balqā', where Yazīd funded several building projects, including a reservoir at al-Muwaqqar and a palace of al-Qaṣṭal. In choosing this region as his home base, Yazīd was acting in a manner consistent with other Marwānid princes, who maintained Damascus as a nominal capital, but moved their courts to different corners of Bilād al-Shām, often under the orders of their father 'Abd al-Malik (e.g. Sulaymān in al-Ramla in Palestine, Hishām in al-Ruṣāfa in eastern Syria, etc.).⁴⁵

What is significant about this observation is that Yazīd's core areas overlap significantly with the location of the vast majority of iconoclastic damage – namely, north and western Transjordan, from the Decapolis down to the Madaba Plains. Disfigured mosaics exist outside this region, of course, but these sites are not far away, relatively speaking (e.g. the damaged churches near Jerusalem). Reynolds ascribes significance to the fact that the area of the damage overlaps with the former Byzantine provinces of Arabia and Palaestina. While this is true, it is also significant that large portions of these provinces show no evidence of iconoclasm.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it is not clear why, aside from the overlap between Christian dioceses and old Byzantine provinces, these political borders would have given rise to a religious and aesthetic phenomenon such as iconoclasm. Reynolds suggests a connection with the patriarchate of Jerusalem, but as he himself notes, the area of the iconoclastic damage was divided between the patriarchates of Jerusalem and Antioch, with a not insignificant number of key sites falling in Antiochene territory (e.g. the dioceses of Bostra, Gerasa-Jarash, Hesban, and Madaba).⁴⁷ In light of this, the most compelling explanation for the peculiar geographic contours of the damage is the

44 Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 8–9, 53.

45 Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 36–42 (with further references; note the debate as to whether al-Qaṣṭal was built by Yazīd or his son, see 50 n. 124 of this article); on the peripatetic behavior of the Umayyad court, see esp. Jere Bacharach, "Marwanid Umayyad Building Activities: Speculations on Patronage," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996), 27–44, for Yazīd II, 36–37.

46 On the geographic scope of the damage, see Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 9–22, 40–47. On the absence of damage in the northern portion of the province of Arabia, what is now southern Syria, see Schick, "Destruction of Images," 134–35.

47 Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," esp. 53–54.

overlap between it and Yazīd's specific sphere of activity before and during his time as caliph.

Reynolds also suggests that the communities engaged in iconoclasm were primarily Chalcedonians.⁴⁸ He uses this observation as a way of downplaying Islamic influence, arguing that the Chalcedonian connection points to the impact of theological debates among Christians, not the influence of Muslims. There are several problems with this thesis. First and foremost, it is notoriously difficult to determine the confessional identity of the community which built and used a given church on the basis of its material remains alone. Inscriptions sometimes preserve the names of bishops or donors who were involved in the construction. If we are lucky, these can be cross-checked with written sources to prove their connection to Chalcedonian circles, as Reynolds does successfully with several sites in the Madaba Plains.⁴⁹ But to assume that the corpus as a whole must be Chalcedonian on the basis of this small number of securely identified churches is methodologically questionable.

Second, several iconoclastic churches are known to have ties to non-Chalcedonian communities. The two main sites – the Church of St. Sergius at Tall al-ʿUmayrī East (11 km south of Amman) (Figure 11.12) and the Church of St. Sergius at Nitl (10 km southeast of Madaba) – were associated with the Ghassānids, onetime confederates of the Byzantines who were also major supporters of the Miaphysite movement, particularly before Islam.⁵⁰ This suggests that they may have remained Miaphysite churches at the start of the eighth century (though the dedicatory inscription at Tall al-ʿUmayrī East confusingly mentions a bishop named Polyeuktos, who may be identified with a Chalcedonian bishop by the same name known from other churches in the region).⁵¹ The Miaphysites are generally thought to have been a minority in this part of the Middle East during the early Islamic period, outnumbered by the Chalcedonians, who controlled the patriarchate of Jerusalem and the

48 Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 53–57.

49 Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 47–53.

50 George Bevan, Greg Fisher, and Denis Genequand, "The Late Antique Church of Tall al-ʿUmayrī East: New Evidence for the Jafnid Family and the Cult of St. Sergius in Northern Jordan," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 373 (2015), 49–68; Michele Piccirillo, "The Church of Saint Sergius at Nitl: A Centre of the Christian Arabs in the Steppe at the Gates of Madaba," *Liber Annuus* 51 (2001), 267–84; Irfan Shahīd, "The Sixth-Century Church Complex at Nitl, Jordan. The Ghassanid Dimension," *Liber Annuus* 51 (2001), 285–92. The evidence from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East seems to have appeared too late to be included in Reynolds' corpus. Reynolds notes the existence of an iconoclastic church at Nitl, but does not note the possible connection with Miaphysites.

51 Bevan, Fisher, and Genequand, "Tall al-ʿUmayrī East," 57.

major monasteries of the Judean Desert.⁵² At the same time, we know that the Miaphysites had dioceses in a number of areas where iconoclastic mosaics were also found, including Bostra, Tiberias, and Jerusalem.⁵³ If this is so, it suggests that image destruction may have been a regional, as opposed to a confessional phenomenon.

Even more revealing is the evidence of iconoclasm among Jews during the 8th century, which Reynolds does not consider in his article. Steven H. Werlin, for instance, has recently discussed three sites in southern Palestine which feature damaged floor mosaics very similar to those found in churches in the same area.⁵⁴ One site, Na'aran (5 km northwest of Jericho), experienced iconoclasm without subsequent repair, while two sites further south, Susiya (13 km south of Hebron) (Figure 11.13) and Eshtemoa (14.5 km south-southwest of Hebron), experienced iconoclasm and were repaired with scrambled tesserae or abstract designs. The damage at all three sites is consistent, targeting animals, symbols of the zodiac, personifications of the seasons, and portraits of Helios. Iconoclasm also affected the liturgical furnishings of two of these sites, as evidenced by the defaced chancel screen at Susiya and the lions flanking the marble menorah at Eshtemoa. Werlin assumes that this damage occurred around the same time as the iconoclasm in churches, and in fact, that they were two expressions of the same phenomenon. Interestingly, the synagogues of Susiya and Eshtemoa were later converted into mosques, probably in the 8th or 9th centuries. It is not clear whether the synagogues had fallen out of use by this time, or if the iconoclasm evident in the mosaics and marble decorations

52 Sidney H. Griffith, "The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites': The Making of an 'Arab Orthodox' Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750–1050 CE)," in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land*, eds. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (Turnhout: 2006), 175–204; for the view that many, if not most of the Chalcedonians in greater Syria may have in fact been Monothelites in this period, see Jack Tannous, "In Search of Monothelitism," *DOP* 68 (2014), 29–68.

53 Giorgio Fedalto, *Hierarchia ecclesiastica orientalis* (Padua: 1988), ii, 744–46 (Bostra), 999–1013 (Jerusalem), 1038–39 (Tiberias); more generally, see Jean Maurice Fiey, *Pour un Oriens Christianus Novus* (Stuttgart: 1993), passim (with limited evidence of Miaphysite dioceses in the southern Levant).

54 Steven H. Werlin, *Ancient Synagogues of Southern Palestine, 300–800 CE* (Leiden: 2015), 29–70, 136–200, 315–17. There are also iconoclastic churches in both areas: Na'aran is not far from the site of Khirbet Asida, and Eshtemoa and Susiya are not far from the site of Tel Kerioth; listed in Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 11–13. For other examples of iconoclastic damage in synagogue floors, see Schick, *Christian Communities*, 202–4; Eliya Ribak, "Archaeological Evidence from the Byzantine Holy Land on the Origins of the Iconoclastic Movement," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 165 (2012), 1–21. I am grateful to Steven Werlin for his help on this matter.

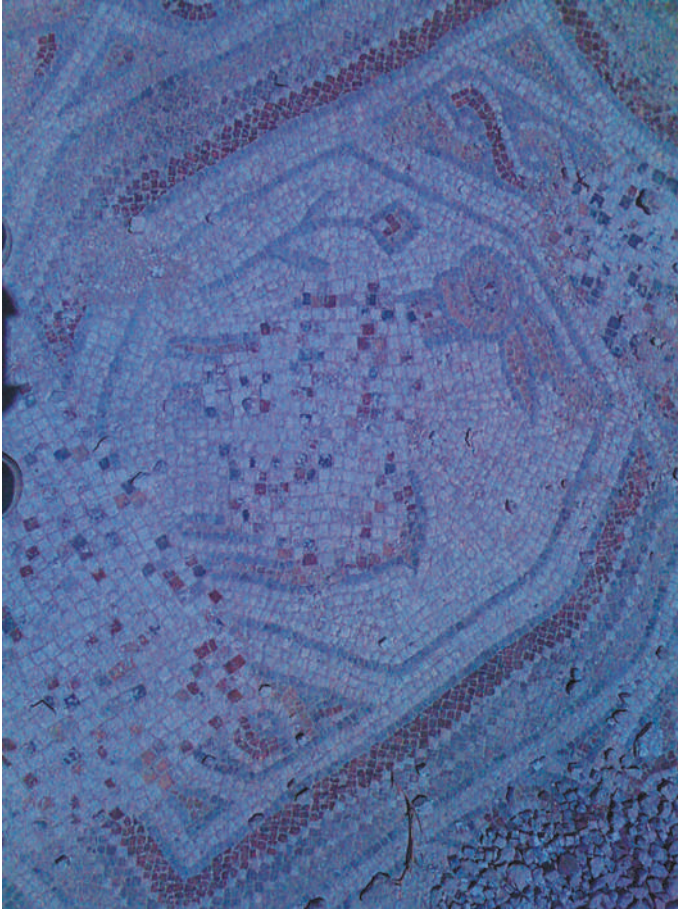


FIGURE 11.12 Disfigured mosaic, Church of St. Sergius, Tall al-'Umayrī East, Jordan
IMAGE: ROBERT SCHICK

was related to this repurposing. If this is so, it may be that iconoclasm helped to “sanitize” these spaces for Muslim prayer, as I have suggested elsewhere with respect to churches in the post-conquest period.⁵⁵

Finally, we have limited but tantalizing evidence of iconoclasm at Islamic sites. One example is the recently re-identified Umayyad palace of al-Ṣinnabra along the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee, not far from al-Ṭabariyya, the

⁵⁵ Sahner, “First Iconoclasm in Islam,” 53–54.



FIGURE 11.13 Disfigured mosaic, Susiya synagogue, West Bank

IMAGE: STEVEN H. WERLIN

capital of the *jund* of al-Urdunn.⁵⁶ The site is closely associated with several early Umayyad caliphs, including Mu'āwiya (r. 661–80), Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (r. 684–85), and 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), though the precise date of the structures is not clear (possibly as early as the mid-7th century). Of note, al-Ṣinnabra includes a large hall laid out in a basilican plan. This structure was originally paved with figural mosaics, including images of ducks, lions, and deer, all of which were disfigured and replaced with scrambled tesserae, much as we see in churches and synagogues (Figure 11.14). The excavators have suggested the damage may date to the first half of the 8th century, assuming it to be part of the same wave of destruction that affected Christian and Jewish sites.

Not far from al-Ṣinnabra is another site known to have been visited and patronized by Muslims: Hammat Gader, located on the slopes beneath the

56 Tawfiq Da'adli, "Khirbat al-Karak and al-Ṣinnabra: An Historical Introduction," in *Bet Yerah, Volume III: Hellenistic Philoteria and Islamic al-Ṣinnabra: The 1933–1986 and 2007–2013 Excavations*, eds. Raphael Greenberg, Oren Tal and Tawfiq Da'adli (Jerusalem: 2017), 125–32; Tawfiq Da'adli, "Stratigraphy and Architecture of the Fortified Palace," in *Bet Yerah, Volume III*, 133–78, esp. 147–53 for the mosaics.



FIGURE 11.14 Disfigured mosaic, Šinnabra palace, Israel; mosaics first installed ca. 7th c
IMAGE: TAWFIQ DA'ADLI

ancient city of Gadara (Ar. Umm Qays). These baths, which had been operating since antiquity, were considered a pilgrimage site due to the medicinal quality of their springs as well as their association with the Prophet Elijah. The baths were extensively renovated by Mu'āwiya in 662 (as commemorated in a famous Greek inscription at the site) and they continued to be used by a mixed population of Muslims, Christians, and Jews until their destruction in the great earthquake of 749. With respect to iconoclasm, two interesting changes are evident. First, a number of Greek inscriptions at Hammat Gader include crosses which were chiseled away in evident acts of religious vandalism. In one case, the defacer also hammered away the Greek word *philochristou* ("Christ-lover"), perhaps objecting to the presence of an explicitly Christian phrase in a space which was by then controlled by Muslims.⁵⁷ Second, a number of Roman

57 Leah Di Segni, "The Greek Inscriptions of Hammat Gader," in *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader: Final Report*, ed. Yizhar Hirschfeld (Jerusalem: 1997), 204–5, 212–13, 228–33, 241–43 (*philochristou*). Note that the damage to crosses was by no means consistent across the site; for instance, the inscription commemorating Mu'āwiya's renovations (which mentions the caliph [Gk. *Maauia amēra almoumenēn*]) and another Muslim by the name

sculptures at Hammat Gader were also damaged. These include sculpted masks on the foundations; a statue of a woman (which seems to have been deliberately thrown into a pile of debris during the Umayyad period); and relief sculptures of animals on the columned portal, which were chiseled away while adjacent images of trees and plants were left intact (recalling the selective destruction of certain images in church floors).⁵⁸ We have a useful *terminus ante quem* for the damage in the earthquake of 749, but no way of securely dating it to any point earlier. That being said, the excavators believe that most of the damage was caused by iconoclasts during the Islamic period. If this is so, it is tempting to see it as part of the same destruction that affected other sites in the region during the 8th century.

What is the significance of this scattered evidence? It suggests strongly that iconoclasm touched every community in Palestine and Transjordan, not just Christians and not just Chalcedonians, as Reynolds has argued. While the largest share of the evidence is Christian, Jews and Muslims were clearly affected by the damage, too. If this bears any relationship with Yazīd's edict, it is worth remembering that none of the written sources explicitly state that the caliph discriminated on the basis of religion: the texts mention attacks against Christian *and* Muslim images, along with accounts of how Jews participated in the damage. These details – especially those concerning Jews, including the magician and court adviser Tessarakontapechys – are usually dismissed as polemical tropes. But in light of the foregoing, one wonders whether they disguise a historical reality in which Umayyad iconoclasm affected more than just Christian sites.

Another point Reynolds makes to dismiss the possibility of Islamic influence concerns wall painting. Acknowledging that the data is sparse, he argues that iconoclasts seem to have focused on imagery on floors and avoided imagery on walls. If this is true, Reynolds takes it as a sign that iconoclasts had theological problems with natural imagery found on floors (which could be perceived as idolatrous), but were open to preserving images of holy people found on walls

of 'Abdallāh b. Abī Hāshim? [Gk. *Abdallah huiou Abouasemou*]) features a cross which was not scratched out. There are many other examples of intact crosses. I thank Sean Leatherbury for pointing me to this evidence.

58 For the masks, see Tania Coen-Uzzielli, "Marble Decorations, Wall Mosaics and Small Finds," in *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader: Final Report*, ed. Yizhar Hirschfeld (Jerusalem: 1997), 442–46. For the statue of the woman, see Roni Ben-Arieh, "The Marble Statues from Hammat Gader," in *Roman Baths of Hammat Gader*, 456–58 (cf. 148–49). For the columned portal, see Hannah Hirschfeld, "The Columned Portal," in *Roman Baths of Hammat Gader*, 184.

(such as Biblical figures and saints). If Muslims were responsible for the damage, Reynolds' logic goes, they would have destroyed both.⁵⁹

The problem with the hypothesis is twofold. First, as Reynolds himself acknowledges, we know almost nothing about the decorations of churches beyond their pavements. To speculate on the differing degrees of destruction between floors and walls – to say nothing about the subjects of these wall paintings – would be hasty. Second, Reynolds lists six sites where we have both mosaic floors and fragments of figural wall decoration.⁶⁰ For Reynolds' theory to be true, we would have to see a strong correlation between the absence of imagery on floors and the presence of imagery on walls. But of the six examples he cites, only one – the Church of the Priest Wa'il at Kastron Mefa'a – Umm al-Raṣāṣ – pairs a damaged floor with imagery on walls.⁶¹ The discrepancy is intriguing, but at best suggestive of wider patterns. Indeed, even within this small sample size, Reynolds' sole example of a mismatch between a floor and a wall is outweighed by five other examples of churches in which images exist in both settings. Thus, the evidence of wall painting makes the hypothesis of Islamic influence no more untenable.⁶²

A final argument in favor of a connection between the mosaics and Yazīd is dating.⁶³ It is important to stress here that the vast majority of damaged floors

59 Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 30–34; on naturalistic imagery in Byzantine mosaic floors and art more generally, see Henry Maguire, *The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art* (University Park: 1987); idem, *Nectar and Illusion: Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature* (Oxford: 2012), 11–47.

60 These sites include Hippos, Northeast Church; Hippos, Northwest Church; Kastron Mefa'a – Umm al-Raṣāṣ, Church of the Priest Wa'il; Petra Church; Rehovot-in-the-Negev, North Church; and Shivta – Sobata, South Church. See also the helpful table at Reynolds, "Palestinian Iconoclasm," 14–20.

61 Reynolds deserves credit for bringing this otherwise little-discussed painting to light; see Michele Piccirillo, "La chiesa del prete Wa'il a Umm al-Rasas – Kastron Mefaa in Giordania," in *Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents*, eds. Frédéric Manns and Eugenio Alliata (Jerusalem: 1993), 313–34, esp. 318. The excavators discovered marks from pickaxes on the frescoes, which may indicate the activity of iconoclasts, but as Reynolds notes, there are several explanations for this which may have nothing to do with religion ("Palestinian Iconoclasm," 33 n. 88).

62 In light of this, the following statement of Reynolds ("Palestinian Iconoclasm," 31) is puzzling: "[...] Theories that stress Islamic coercion or aniconic influence upon Palestinian iconoclasm are driven, in essence, by a direct comparison between the decorative traditions of two separate architectural registers wrongly treated as interchangeable: floors and walls." I do not see why Muslims or Christians acting under Islamic influence would limit their damage to one area of a building over another.

63 This and the following paragraph draw on Sahner, "First Iconoclasm in Islam," 38–42 (with further references).

either have no date or the only date they do have goes back to the installation of the floors in the 6th century. Thus, there is no way to ascertain exactly when the iconoclasm took place. To find a dated mosaic from the eighth century is extremely rare, and as a result, when such churches do exist, we should analyze them with great care. Several sites are significant in this respect. These include the Lower Church at al-Quwaysma, 3 kilometers south of Amman, whose mosaics were installed in 717/718; the church of St. Stephen at Katron Mefa'a – Umm al-Raṣāṣ, 30 kilometers southeast of Madaba, whose mosaics were installed in 718; and the Acropolis Church at Ma'in, 5 kilometers southwest of Madaba, whose mosaics were installed in 719/720. In all three churches, mosaics with figural imagery were damaged at some point after their installation. Based on the dating, the damage could have occurred because of Yazīd's edict (ca. 723–724). By the same token, however, it could have happened before the edict (pre-723) or after (post-724).

Another intriguing site is the Church of the Virgin at 'Ayn al-Kanīsa near Mt. Nebo. There, sixth-century figural mosaics were damaged – possibly in the eighth century when al-Quwaysma, Kastron Mefa'a – Umm al-Raṣāṣ, and Ma'in were also disfigured. Unlike these churches, however, whose mosaics were not restored, a fire devastated the church at 'Ayn al-Kanīsa sometime in the eighth century, prompting the community to rebuild the church and install a new floor with images in 762. There is nothing comparable to 'Ayn al-Kanīsa elsewhere in the region. The decision to go back to a pre-iconoclastic phase in the decorative scheme is even more surprising when we consider that most church mosaics installed from the mid-8th century onward were adamantly geometric (e.g. the chancel of the Church of St. Stephen at Kastron-Mefa'a – Umm al-Raṣāṣ, or the Church of the Virgin at Madaba). Thus, 'Ayn al-Kanīsa points to an attempt to return to an earlier period before the onset of iconoclasm. Could it be that the community wished to restore its images at a time when pressure from the Muslim authorities had lifted, or if we assume the damage was not connected to the Umayyads, when internal theological trends had changed? It is impossible to know for certain.

If Muslims were indeed involved in the destruction, this may explain a curious pattern to the damage. Anyone who inspects the mosaics in churches, synagogues, and palaces will note instantly that the destruction affected mostly images of ordinary people and animals – not sacred images as such. Churches, of course, were holy spaces, but the scenes that the iconoclasts targeted were not worthy of veneration in and of themselves. As we shall see below, Muslims were especially concerned with these kinds of scenes: images of beings containing the breath of life (Ar. *rūḥ*). One possibility, therefore, is that Christians (and Jews and Muslims) were acting in compliance with orders that reflected

Islamic theological concerns or they themselves had internalized these concerns.

Who caused the damage is, of course, the great question: was it Christians or individuals working under Islamic influence, whether Muslims or Christians? Regardless of who ordered the damage, most scholars agree that Christians were the ones who carried out the damage and repair work. In light of this, is it possible that the Umayyad court depended on church authorities to carry out their orders? Were certain bishops more compliant than others, and if so, was this related to their personal antipathy for images? Given that Palestinian iconoclasm evidently continued after Yazīd's death (as we see at Jabāliyā, whose damage is securely dated to after 732), what relationship did this have to state-sponsored iconoclasm years earlier? These are the pressing questions which emerge from the evidence, but which the evidence will perhaps never allow us to answer for sure. For now, it seems clear that Yazīd's edict had a limited scope – limited by time, namely, the brief period between its promulgation in 723 and the caliph's death in 724; and limited by geography, namely, the areas where Yazīd was most active. Pre-modern states often had great difficulty imposing their will in areas far outside their central control; given this, it is not surprising to find the possible archaeological record related to Yazīd's actions so confusing, contradictory, and partial, as Reynolds rightly highlights. Ultimately, however, there are few grounds on which to dismiss Yazīd as a possible factor in the damage, and as I hope I have shown, there are some good reasons to believe he played a part in it.

7 Images and Context

Despite the debate in the previous sections, what is certain is that the edict of Yazīd was the only example of organized image destruction in early Islamic history. What we find in the decades after his reign are scattered reports of attacks against images, but nothing comparable to his systematic legislation, however short-lived it may have been. Islamic sources, for example, describe a famous censer decorated with human images (Ar. *tamāthīl*) that once belonged to the Caliph 'Umar I, who used it to perfume the Prophet's mosque in Medina. During the reign of the Caliph al-Mahdī (775–785), however, a governor of Medina reportedly obliterated the images by hammering them away, thereby “sanitizing” it for Islamic use.⁶⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) tells of the 'Abbasid

64 M.J. de Goeje (ed.), *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum* (Leiden: 1870–94), vii, 66.

caliph al-Muhtadī (869–870) who, in a fit of puritanism, discarded his fine clothes and furnishings; melted down his gold and silver vessels; and erased the images (*al-ṣuwar*) that had adorned his chambers. Apparently, these were done to please religious scholars at court.⁶⁵

Christian sources are also filled with reports about attacks against icons. That being said, these stories are extremely repetitive, so much so that they probably represent an anti-Islamic trope far more than real accounts of iconoclastic violence. The most famous comes from the life of the martyr and Muslim convert Anthony al-Qurashī (d. 799). While still a Muslim, Anthony is said to have fired an arrow at an icon of St. Theodore, which was displayed in a church near his home in Damascus. As the arrow was about to hit the image, it turned around in midair and flew back in his direction, striking him in the hand.⁶⁶ We find similar stories in the writings of Anastasius of Sinai (d. ca. 700) and the *Acts of the Council of Nicaea* in 787.⁶⁷

Absent imperial legislation such as the edict of Yazīd, we are left to track changing attitudes towards images from the mid-8th century onward through two main bodies of evidence: material culture and Islamic traditions (*ḥadīths*). The art historical evidence includes several monuments which collectively underscore a major principle of the Islamic “theory of images,” at least as it manifested itself in practice from the 8th century onward: the permissibility of images in secular settings and objects, such as palaces and luxury goods, and their relative impermissibility in sacred settings and objects, such as mosques and Qurʾan manuscripts. The most revealing monument in this respect is the Umayyad palace complex of al-Mshattā, located 25 kilometers south of Amman, which is thought to have been commissioned by al-Walīd (II) b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 743–44). The façade of al-Mshattā, now housed mostly at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, is geometric in design, but small images of animals fill the stone foliage (Figure 11.15). On the portion of the façade along

65 al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar* (*Les prairies d'or*), ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: 1966–79), v, 98, which explains that al-Muhtadī was courting the favor of the ʿulamāʾ and the *fuqahāʾ*, and was acting in imitation of his pious Umayyad predecessor ʿUmar II. I learned about this anecdote while attending Barry Flood’s Slade Lectures at the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 2019.

66 Emanuela Braidā and Chiara Pelisetti (eds.), *Storia di Rawḥ al-Quraṣī: Un discendente di Maometto che scelse di divenire cristiano* (Turin: 2001), 97; discussion in Christian C. Sahner, *Christian Martyrs under Islam: Religious Violence and the Making of the Muslim World* (Princeton: 2018), 84–92, 105–10.

67 Anastasius: André Binggeli, “Anastase le Sinaïte: *Récits sur le Sinaï et Récits utiles à l’âme*: Édition, traduction et commentaire” (PhD dissertation, Université Paris IV, 2001), 220 (Gk.), 532 (Fr.). Council of 787: Mansi, *Collectio*, xiii, col. 18.

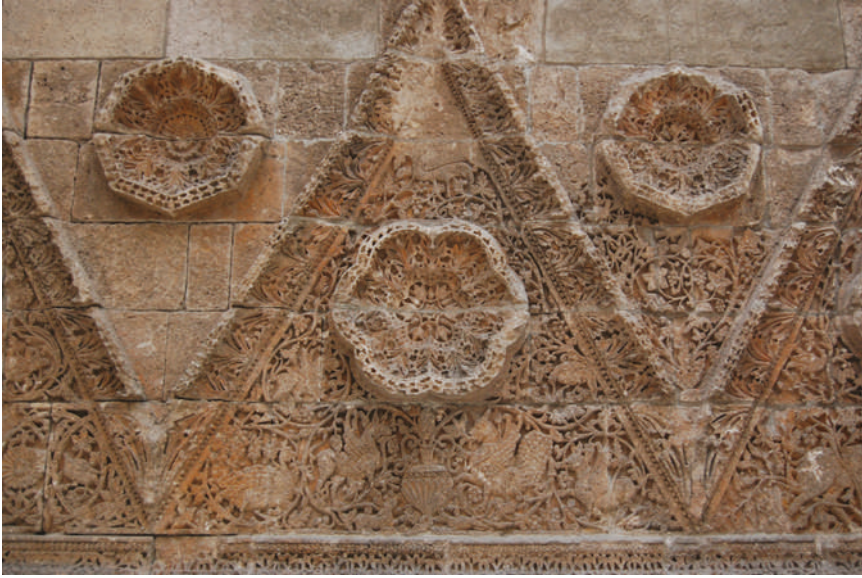


FIGURE 11.15 Mshattā palace façade, figural panel, Pergamon Museum, Berlin; ca. 125–26/ 743–44

IMAGE: ALAIN FOUAD GEORGE

the palace's mosque, however, the animals suddenly disappear and all that remains is geometric design (Figure 11.16). It is a powerful illustration of the division between secular and sacred space and the general absence of images in the latter.⁶⁸ That being said, sacred spaces were not totally devoid of images, as Lawrence Nees has recently shown with respect to the eagle columns found in the buildings of the Ḥaram al-Sharīf in Jerusalem, which are recycled spolia from the pre-Islamic period.⁶⁹

Although Muslims studiously avoided figural art in mosques, they filled the interior of their private homes with images of humans and animals. This was especially true in the homes of elite Muslims, including members of the caliphal court, who celebrated *la dolce vita* with iconography plucked from the visual canon of late antique empires. The most famous example is the Umayyad bath house of Quṣayr 'Amra, around 80 kilometers east of Amman.⁷⁰ Part pleasure

68 Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven: 1987), 89; idem, "The Date and Meaning of Mshatta," *DOP* 41 (1987), 243–247.

69 Lawrence Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem* (Leiden: 2016), 100–43.

70 Garth Fowden, *Quṣayr 'Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley: 2004).



FIGURE 11.16 Mshattā palace façade, non-figural panel (exterior of *qibla* wall), Pergamon Museum, Berlin; ca. 125–26/ 743–44

IMAGE: ALAIN FOUAD GEORGE

palace, hunting lodge, and *ḥammām*, Quṣayr ‘Amra is covered with brilliant frescoes throughout its interior. These include portraits of the caliphal family (Figure 11.17), the defeated kings of the ancient world, scenes from Greek mythology, the zodiac, images of the hunt, and voluptuous women (not unlike the servants who probably tended to al-Walīd and his guests when they visited the bathhouse). For anyone accustomed to the austere decoration of early Qur’an manuscripts, seeing Quṣayr ‘Amra for the first time can be an arresting experience. That being said, the building underscores a bigger point about aesthetics in early Islamic culture, namely, images could be savored in the privacy of a home or the public areas of a palace, but not in the sacred precincts of a mosque.

We see something similar in the early ‘Abbasid period with the famous wall paintings of the caliph’s palace in Samarra.⁷¹ These frescoes are also exuberantly figural, recalling images from the Sasanian court. Animal imagery was also common in luxury goods, including textiles, metalwork, and sculpture, much of which also drew on pre-Islamic Iranian traditions.⁷² Despite ‘Abd

⁷¹ Ernst Herzfeld, *Die Malereien von Samarra* (Berlin: 1927).

⁷² See various examples in Helen C. Evans with Brandie Ratliff (eds.), *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th–9th Centuries* (New Haven and London: 2012), esp. 200–43.



FIGURE 11.17 Portrait of al-Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik (?), Qusayr 'Amra, Jordan, ca. 723–43
IMAGE: NADIA ALI

al-Malik's reforms at the turn of the 8th century, figural iconography also persisted in some coins: copper coins from Umayyad Iran after the reign of 'Abd al-Malik, for example, continued to feature a range of Sasanian and Christian iconography (Figures 11.18–11.19).⁷³ A famous display medal of al-Mutawakkil (r. 847–61) portrays the 'Abbasid caliph in a frontal portrait modeled on that of Khusraw II.⁷⁴

73 Luke Treadwell, "The Copper Coinage of Umayyad Iran," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 168 (2008), 331–81.

74 Nahidh A.R. Daftari, "The Medallion of Caliph al-Mutawakkil," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 17 (1977), 170–71.



FIGURE 11.18 Arab-Sasanian coin, obverse, Sistān, 93 AH? / 711-12 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



FIGURE 11.19 Arab-Sasanian coin, reverse, Sistān, 93 AH? / 711-12 AD
IMAGE © ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

8 The Prohibition on Images in Islamic Law and Tradition

As we have seen, the middle and late Umayyad periods were a time of evolving attitudes about the permissibility of images. As G.R.D. King and Sidney H. Griffith have shown, Islamic doctrines emerged as part of a wider effort to claim the public sphere for Islam.⁷⁵ This process occurred in parallel with Yazīd's iconoclastic edict, as well as the scattered attacks against images and crosses mentioned above. We can see it most clearly, however, in the emergence of a legal prohibition against images in the Islamic tradition, commonly known by scholars as the *Bilderverbot*.⁷⁶ In one particularly famous *ḥadīth* that began circulating in this period, the Prophet stated that artists will be cursed on Judgment Day for having breathed spirit (*rūḥ*) into their creations. After all, only God is entitled to breathe life into that which He fashioned (though prophets seem to be exceptions to this rule, judging from the famous story of the child Jesus breathing life into clay birds in Q. al-*Mā'ida* 5:110). These *ḥadīths* have many sources, but one of the most important were anxieties about rituals of idol animation, such as were common in many cultures of the ancient world, including those of Babylonia. These fears also manifested themselves in the Bible (cf. Habakkuk 2:18-19, Psalm 135:15-18) and appear to have surfaced again in the *ḥadīths*.⁷⁷

As Rudi Paret and Daan van Reenen have shown, the image traditions found in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections go back to the Umayyad period, but just how far back remains a matter of debate.⁷⁸ Paret initially dated these traditions to the closing decade of the seventh century, arguing that they came into circulation at the same time as 'Abd al-Malik's well known financial reforms. In a more rigorous study based on a larger corpus of *ḥadīth*, van Reenen challenged Paret's dating, arguing that the *Bilderverbot* originated in a slightly later

75 Geoffrey R. D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985), 267-77; Sidney H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons: A Moment in the Christian/Muslim Encounter in Early Islamic Times," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VIIe-VIIIe siècles: Actes du Colloque internationale Lyon – Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, Paris – Institut du Monde Arabe, 11-15 septembre 1990*, eds. Pierre Canivet and Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais (Damascus: 1992), 121-38.

76 See the recent revisionist views of Nadia Ali, "The Royal Veil: Early Islamic Figural Art and the *Bilderverbot* Reconsidered," *Religion* 47 (2017), 425-44.

77 I owe this insight to Barry Flood's Slade Lectures at the University of Oxford, Hilary Term, 2019.

78 Rudi Paret, "Die Entstehungszeit des islamischen Bilderverbots," *Kunst des Orients* 11 (1976-1977), 158-81; Daan Van Reenen. "The Bilderverbot, a new survey," *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 27-77.

period ca. 720–775. If this is true, it would prove that the standard prohibition on images emerged in concert with or shortly after Yazīd's edict, not before. Given this, we might see Yazīd's actions as a harbinger of things to come – or even a shaper of later developments – rather than a reflection of the way things already were. Furthermore, if Reynolds is correct that the disfigured mosaic floors from eighth-century Palestine reflect internal Christian debates about images, then it is possible to imagine how such debates may have arisen in concert with developments within Islamic scholarly circles.

In general, the *ḥadīths* associated with the *Bilderverbot* express disapproval of images but do not necessarily condone iconoclasm. A good example is an account of a conversation between the Prophet Muḥammad and two Muslim women, Umm Ḥabība and Umm Salama, who took part in the first Hijra to Ethiopia in ca. 614–15. There, they reported seeing a church that was richly decorated with paintings. Upon hearing this, the Prophet explained to the women that Christians were in the habit of building shrines (Ar. *masājīd*) over the graves of their saints, as well as adorning them with images. "These shall be the worst people at the resurrection," Muḥammad proclaimed. At the same time, there are several traditions which do describe – and therefore, seem to promote – acts of iconoclasm. One of these *ḥadīths* claims that the angel Gabriel refused to enter the Prophet's house owing to the images he found inside. Therefore, Gabriel ordered Muḥammad to cut off the heads of these pictures "so they may become like trees." Other traditions, meanwhile, speak of the Prophet tearing apart objects embroidered with crosses (Ar. *taṣlīb*, *muṣallab*, *ṣulub*). There may be a connection between the sentiments voiced in these *ḥadīths* and real acts of iconoclasm in the eighth century, including Yazīd's edict.

Taken as a whole, the *ḥadīths* about images contain the kernel of an aesthetic theory that would develop in Islamic culture over time. Muslim writers of later periods built on this discourse to express their own ideas about images unmoored from Prophetic tradition. An interesting example is a passage ascribed to the philosopher Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī (d. 925/35). In it, al-Rāzī praised the therapeutic, even medicinal qualities of the images one found on the walls of bathhouses (perhaps not unlike the frescoes at Quṣayr 'Amra or the statue from the bath of Zabbān). These he related to different parts of the human soul:

[The philosophers of old] were not content with a single subject but undertook a division into three, since they knew that the body possesses three sorts of spirits: animal, psychological, and physical. Hence they arranged that each subject of a painting should serve to strengthen and increase one of the above-mentioned powers. For the animal power they

have depicted battles, fights, hunts on horseback and the chase of beasts. For the psychological power they have depicted love, themes of lovers and beloved, how they accuse one another or embrace, etc. And for physical power they have depicted gardens, trees pleasant to look at, a mass of flowers in charming colors. Such and similar pictures belong to first-class baths.⁷⁹

Such a philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic interpretation flies in the face of what some imagine as the uncompromising iconophobia of early Islamic culture. Attitudes towards images were clearly more nuanced, even after the crystallization of the *ḥadīth* traditions in the 8th century. But the most important evidence for the variety of approaches to figural art in Islam is material culture itself. Ultimately, one is hard pressed to think of a time or place when Islamic art was ever completely devoid of images, even if images were missing from certain settings and media.

9 Conclusion

Across the frontier in the Byzantine Empire, an even more vituperative battle over images was being waged. In the long term, the supporters of icons in Byzantium prevailed, and we owe the majority of our surviving sources about iconoclasm to them. Given this, we should take the more polemical claims of the texts with a grain of salt. This applies especially to efforts to connect Byzantine and Islamic iconoclasm, such as the slanderous claim that Leo III – the instigator of iconoclasm in Byzantium – was “Saracen-minded” (Gk. *sarakēnophrōn*), as Theophanes called him.⁸⁰ Such insults circulated alongside stories claiming that the Jewish magician who had inspired Yazīd eventually bolted for Byzantium, where his ideas came to influence the emperor and his court. For its opponents in Byzantium, therefore, iconoclasm represented the unholy conspiracy of a Jew, a Muslim, and a heretical Christian king. The polemical purpose of such stories is clear, but is it possible that they contain an element of truth regarding a connection between the two iconoclasm, the one Byzantine, the other Umayyad?

79 al-Ghuzūlī, *Maṭālīʿ al-budūr fī manāzil al-surūr* (Cairo: 1881–83), ii, 7–8; translation in Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (London: 1975), 266. I am grateful to Nadia Ali for this reference.

80 E.g. De Boor, *Chronographia*, i, 405 (Gk.); Mango and Scott, *Theophanes*, 560 (Eng.).

The coincidence of the two iconoclasms – understood not merely as episodes of imperial law-making, but also as manifestations of deep theological divisions within the two religions – is impossible to ignore. And here, the influence of Islam on Byzantine Christianity must have been significant.⁸¹ It was significant not only because the early Muslims seem to have sensitized the Byzantines to the perils of venerating “idols” (though the process whereby this occurred remains unclear). It was also significant because of the suffering the Muslims imposed on the Byzantines during the previous hundred years of warfare and conquest. Lest we forget, the Arab conquests were a great tragedy for the East Roman Empire and provoked much soul-searching in the years that followed. As they struggled to explain these losses, Byzantine Christians concluded that the conquests were a kind of divine punishment for sinfulness. There were many sins to atone for, of course, but one of the biggest may have been the veneration of images: a form of idolatry which infected the empire and which now had to be purged. If this is so, Islam certainly had a profound influence on the events that followed.

81 Crone, “Islam, Judeo-Christianity, and Byzantine Iconoclasm.”

Iconoclasm, Images, and the West

Thomas F. X. Noble

The reader might have expected an “in” where my title has an “and.” My choice of words is deliberate. As far as we know, the early medieval West had only two incidents of iconoclasm, one at the end of the 6th century and the other in the early 9th century. In neither case do we have the kind of clarifying details that would permit us to say precisely what happened and why. Nevertheless, the West did become embroiled in Byzantine iconoclasm on several occasions and in several different places. In England there was a faint echo of Byzantine iconoclasm in Bede’s Northumbria. The Franks addressed iconoclasm at least three times: in the 760s, in the 790s, and in the 820s. The papacy engaged with Byzantine iconoclasm in the 720s, 760s, 780s, 810s, 820s, and 850s–860s. Some of these cases are obscure but some left behind copious political, ecclesiological, and theological reflection. While not speaking of iconoclasm per se, some Frankish writers continued to discuss images down to the 850s. The following pages will examine these encounters between East and West in an attempt to establish what the Franks and popes knew about what happened in the East and what they thought about it. There is very little evidence that anyone in the East knew or cared about what the Franks thought. After looking at Western iconoclasm and at Western responses to Byzantine iconoclasm, this essay will conclude with some reflections on what Western writers actually said about images themselves.

Let us begin with the two known cases of iconoclasm in the West. The first case is revealed by two letters of Pope Gregory I (590–604) to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles dispatched in 599 and 600.¹ Gregory had learned – we do not know how – that Serenus was distressed because some people were adoring images – we do not know what they were doing – and so he broke them up and threw them out of churches – we do not know which churches. Gregory praised Serenus for preventing “*manufacta*” (things made by human hands) from being adored but told him that he should by no means destroy pictures because, in his famous formulation “pictures are used in churches so that those

1 S. Gregorii Magni, *Registrum Epistolarum*, IX. 209 (July 599) and XI. 10 (October 600), ed. Dag Norberg, CCSL (Turnhout: 1982), vol. 140A, pp. 768, 873–76.

who do now know letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books." A year and a half later Gregory rebuked Serenus again. The latter had apparently thought that Gregory's first letter was a forgery. Gregory asked Serenus if he had ever heard of a priest doing what he did and he told him that while it is wrong to adore pictures, pictures do reveal what is to be adored. Gregory went on to say that Serenus should set a good example as pastor of his flock and that he should appreciate images for their ability to teach and to elicit compunction.

The matter ended there. Gregory explicitly mentioned walls so we must presume that either mosaics or frescoes were the objects of Serenus's scorn and Gregory's defense. Detachable, portable images do not seem to fit the known circumstances. Who was involved? There is no way to say precisely. Marseilles was a major port. Might there have been people resident there from the eastern Mediterranean who viewed images differently than people in the West generally did?² Gregory references "gentiles" so one might wonder whether both he and Serenus were worried about pagans or about syncretistic practices that crossed what was perhaps a not very firm boundary between Christianity and paganism.³

In the end, the case of Serenus of Marseilles provides very little evidence for either a cult of images or for its radical opposite, iconoclasm. Gregory believed that images were never to be destroyed and that they were useful for instruction and for eliciting salutary emotions or spiritual responses. Where instruction is concerned, scholars have pointed out that no one could be expected to "read" images without careful preparation.⁴ Images were not, could not be, "living writing," as Gregory of Nyssa once argued.⁵ Robert Markus once pointed to two examples that he believed revealed a cult of images in Gaul. In his *Glory of the Martyrs* Gregory of Tours spoke of a crucifix in Narbonne that was stolen by a

2 Ingrid Heidrich, "Syrische Kirchengemeinden im Frankreich des 6. Jahrhunderts," in Hubert Mordek (ed.), *Aus Archiven und Bibliotheken: Festschrift für Raymund Kottje zum 65. Geburtstag*, (Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte) 3 (Freiburg: 1992), 21–32.

3 Herbert Kessler, "Pictorial Narrative and Church Mission in Sixth-Century Gaul," in Herbert Kessler and Marianne Schreve (eds.), *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Studies in the History of Art) 16 (Washington, DC: 1985), 75–91. Both John Cassian (*Conference* x 5, ed. E. Pichery, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 54 [Paris: 1958], 78–9), and Isidore of Seville (*Sententiarum Libri Tres* 2. 11. 9, *PL* 83: 612B–C) express similar concerns.

4 Celia Chazelle, "Pictures, Books, and the Illiterate: Pope Gregory I's Letters to Serenus of Marseilles," *Word & Image* 6 (1990), 138–53; Lawrence Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?" *Word & Image* 5 (1989), 227–51. Both scholars deal with the older literature going back decades.

5 *Oratio laudatoria sancti magni martyris Theodori*, PG 46: 737D–740B.

Jew and that bled to reveal the theft.⁶ He also tells of an image of a naked Christ that asked to be clothed.⁷ I can add two similar examples. In his *Life of St. Martin*, Gregory relates that in Ravenna there was an image of Martin with an oil lamp burning beneath it. Oil from that lamp was capable of healing the sick.⁸ There was in the church of St. Martin in Tours an inscription ascribed to Paulinus of Perigueux describing a prostrate person pleading for a cure before an image of Martin.⁹ I am skeptical. Neither the crucifix that bled not nor the images that asked to be clothed give evidence of cult practices associated with these images or with any others. The first instance might reflect antisemitism and the second prudery, asceticism, or social conventions. Gregory's odd tales are utterly unlike any accounts of miraculous images from the East. The lamp in Ravenna is a solitary witness and the inscription in Tours hardly identifies a site of cult, unless of course the prostrate person was praying to St. Martin. If this is the case, then the example supports Pope Gregory in two respects: An image shows the person to be adored and provokes salutary emotions. But there is no cult of images here.

I turn now to Bishop Claudius of Turin in the early 9th century who presents us with the second known case of iconoclasm in the West. In about 825 Claudius issued an *Apology* addressed to his former pupil, Theutmir, who was then abbot of Psalmody, a monastery in the Camargue.¹⁰ A contemporary, Bishop Jonas of Orleans, says that the *Apology* was as long as the Psalms of David plus fifty psalms.¹¹ Today we have only a rather disjointed fragment that occupies a little more than three pages in the standard edition. Claudius says that controversy surrounding him spread all over the Frankish world but we have no evidence to corroborate that claim. There is evidence that Claudius's case was ventilated at Louis the Pious's court, probably in 824 or 825,¹² but the records of the Paris Colloquy of 825, that Louis called to address renewed Byzantine iconoclasm (see below), never mention Claudius. This is puzzling because Dungal, one of Claudius's critics, about whom more just below, says

6 *De Gloria martyrum*, 21, eds. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Hannover: 1885), 51.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *De virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*, 15, eds. Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Hannover: 1885), 597.

9 *Inscriptions chrétiennes de Gaule antérieure au VIIIe siècle*, ed. Edmond Frederic LeBlant (Paris: 1856), vol. 1, 237.

10 *Apologeticum atque Rescriptum Claudii Episcopi adversus Theutmirum abbatem*, Epistola 12, ed. Ernst Dümmler, *MGH, Epistolae* 4, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 2 (Berlin: 1895), 610–13. For the date see my *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009), 425, n. 11.

11 *De cultu imaginum*, *PL* 106: 312C.

12 *Ibid.*, 306C.

that Claudius had declined to appear at a synod whose members he called a "collection of asses."¹³ Apart from Paris 825 no other church assembly is known that Claudius could have refused to attend.

What did Claudius do and what did he believe? In his *Apology* Claudius says that as soon as he got to Turin as its bishop (816–18) he found "all the basilicas filled against the order of truth with images, worthy of anathema, and because everyone paid cult (*colebant*) to them I began to destroy them all by myself." Neither Serenus nor Gregory mention explicitly what image worshipers were doing. Claudius says that people were prostrating, bending, and bowing before images. From Jonas's treatise we may infer that Claudius also objected to people's kissing images.¹⁴ He says further that his actions earned him the severe displeasure of his people and that if God had not protected him they would have killed him. Faint hints in the evidence suggest that Claudius replaced whatever it was that he destroyed with sculptures bearing abstract geometric designs including crosses.¹⁵ Bearing in mind that we have only a small fragment of Claudius's lengthy *Apology*, we can nonetheless discern the basic shape of some of his arguments against images. In the first place, he adverts to the Exodus (20.4) prohibition that had been raised in late antiquity and probably in the earliest days of Byzantine iconoclasm. Second, he appears to have discussed the different terms for adoration. He seems to have regarded attempts to differentiate between, for example, adoration and veneration as mere sophistry. Claudius was a keen student of Augustine and he could have derived his views on adoration from the North African father.¹⁶ It is possible, but unlikely, that he knew the deeply Augustinian *Opus Caroli Regis* (see below) of Theodulf of Orleans. It is unlikely, but possible, that he knew Byzantine arguments on the subject. Third, Claudius rejected the argument that images could be accorded some measure of worship on account of the person(s) they represent. Pope Gregory I, as noted, had defended that very idea. It was an old one going back at least to Basil of Caesarea.¹⁷ Fourth, Claudius rejected the cult of the cross that was itself gaining dramatically in prominence in the early

13 *Responsa contra Claudium: A Controversy on Holy Images*, ed. Paolo Zanna, (Per Verba) 17 (Florence: 2002), ch. 246, 250.

14 *De cultu imaginum*, PL 106: 342C-D.

15 Silvana Casartelli Novelli, "L'immagine della croce nella scultura longobarda e nell'entrelacs carolingio della diocesi di Torino," in Karl Schmid (ed.), *Riforma religiosa e arti nell'epoca carolingia* (Bologna: 1983), 109–15.

16 Fundamental on Augustine's influence on Claudius is Pascal Boulhol, *Claude de Turin: Un évêque iconoclaste dans l'occident carolingien* (Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Serie Moyen Âge et Temps Modernes) 38 (Paris: 2002).

17 *De spiritu sancto* XVII, PG 32: 149.

9th century.¹⁸ Actually, his rejection of the cult of the cross was an element of his insistence that worship was to be “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) and that no manufactured things merited any devotion whatsoever. This is another old argument and, again as noted, Gregory too said that *manufacta* could not be worshiped while also saying that images should not be destroyed. Claudius simply took what seemed to him to be the logical next step. It is worth noting that the *Apology* also railed against relics, pilgrimages, the cult of the saints, and papal authority but these are not the topics of this essay.

Claudius's case presents a number of puzzling features. Louis sent Claudius to Turin as early as 816 and not later than 818. His *Apology* dates from 824 or 825. Why did Louis and his court wait so long to take account of Claudius? Claudius had spent some time at Louis's Aquitanian court at Chasseneuil before Louis became emperor in 814. He sent a series of biblical commentaries to the court and in a letter to Theutmir from 823 or 824 he took pleasure in boasting of his friends in high places.¹⁹ In 824 Emperor Michael II of Byzantium wrote to Louis the Pious about image policies and some other issues (see below in detail). Apparently Theutmir had reported to the court about Claudius's iconoclasm and that report provoked the *Apology* which, it seems, Theutmir forwarded to the court. For a good many years, I think, Claudius was ignored as a sort of eccentric but after Michael's letter arrived the image question exploded and Claudius's behavior was perhaps an embarrassment that required attention. Even so, should we assume that Claudius had cleaned out his diocesan churches pretty quickly after assuming office, or should we think that he carried on an iconoclastic campaign for the better part of a decade? As far as we know, Claudius was never disciplined. Louis's court responded to Claudius by commissioning two significant scholars, Bishops Jonas of Orleans and Dungal of Pavia, to refute the *Apology*.²⁰ Their treatises help us to understand some of what Claudius said, albeit neither of them set out to be anything like fair or impartial. On the whole the treatises repeat some of what Theodulf had said in the 790s, a good deal of what was expressed in Paris in 825, and in reality much of the discussion in favor of religious images that had been percolating since the fourth century. Claudius died in 827 and his iconoclasm seems to have died with him. He had no disciples and led no movement. He himself said nothing original and

18 Celia Chazelle, *The Crucified God in the Carolingian Era* (Cambridge: 2001).

19 Claudius, Ep. 10 (as in n. 10 above), 609.

20 Jonas, *De cultu imaginum* (as in n. 11 above) and Dungal, *Responsa contra Claudium* (as in n. 13 above). I summarize and discuss at length both treatises in my *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 295–313.

those who refuted him broke no new ground. I am unaware that later Lollards or Protestants looked back to Claudius as a spiritual or intellectual forebear.



I turn now to cases where iconoclasm, in its manifold forms, prompted awareness or response in the West. In the 790s and again in the 820s the Carolingian courts got involved in a serious way with the issue of images and as a result abundant evidence survives – which is not to say that every aspect of each case is as clear as we might wish. In other cases, the evidence is sparse, the context is murky, and the consequences are difficult to discern.

In the briefest possible terms, the traditional narrative of the outbreak of Byzantine iconoclasm blames it all on Emperor Leo III. Supposedly upset by volcanic eruptions on the islands of Thera and Therasia that he attributed to divine punishment, and egged on by Jewish and Muslim opposition to images, Leo issued a decree against images, perhaps in 726, took down an image above the Bronze Gate of the imperial palace, destroyed other images, and persecuted image worshipers. Some bishops in Bithynia, chiefly Constantine of Nakoleia and Thomas of Klaudiopolis, either influenced Leo or were influenced by him. Historians today, both Byzantinists and western medievalists who are knowledgeable about Byzantium, take virtually no aspect of this story at face value.²¹

Although skepticism about the traditional narrative is fully warranted, some evidence from Rome and Northumbria suggests strongly that something pertaining to images had taken place in the East. Chapters 13 to 16 in the *vita* of Pope Gregory II (715–731) in the *Liber Pontificalis*, the set of contemporaneous papal biographies extending from the 6th century to the late 9th century, report in considerable detail on papal struggles with the Lombards in Italy and on the papal rejection of imperial attempts to collect taxes in Italy. Then chapter 17 reports that “orders having been dispatched (*iussionibus missis*), the emperor decreed that no image of any saint, martyr, or angel should be kept in a church. He declared them all accursed.” The emperor also told the pope that he would be deposed if he did not comply. Instead, Gregory “despised the prince’s irreligious order, and armed himself against the emperor as against an enemy, denouncing his heresy in writing to Christians everywhere to be on their guard.”²² Byzantinists no longer believe that Leo issued a general edict prohibiting images so the “orders” mentioned in the *Liber Pontificalis* are difficult to interpret. Perhaps the emperor

21 The issues, sources, and older literature are fully discussed in Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge: 2011), 69–155.

22 *Liber Pontificalis* (hereafter LP), ed. Louis Duchesne (repr. Paris: 1981), vol. 1, 403–405.

wrote to the pope to try to bring him around to his point of view on images, or at least on some images, or on the location of images. Perhaps the emperor sent an “order” dealing particularly with the pope’s truculence in the matter of taxes and mentioned images in passing. The question of images had never before come up in any communication between Rome and Constantinople.

The situation in Rome in the late 720s and early 730s is partly clarified by two additional pieces of evidence and also by the fact that the *vita* of Gregory II exists in two recensions, one roughly contemporary and one, a bit longer and more detailed, that probably dates from the 740s.²³ In 729 King Liutprand of the Lombards visited Rome and very shortly after that he built a church, or perhaps a monastery, in conjunction with a royal residence at Corteolona. In that church he mounted an inscription that says “Caesar Leo fell into the pit of schism from the summit of righteousness persuaded by a miserable scholar.” Neither images nor orders are mentioned in the inscription but it seems likely that Liutprand got wind of some sort of theological troubles while he was in Rome. Later sources recount legends of, for example, the Jewish wizard Tassarokontapechys who supposedly stirred up Caliph Yazid against images and the caliph somehow influenced Leo III. Perhaps legends or rumors of some sort were already circulating and help to explain the “miserable scholar.” The image controversy is the only plausible candidate for “schism.”²⁴ Pope Gregory III (see below) called a synod in 731 and invited Patriarch Antonius of Grado. The pope’s letter of invitation mentions attacks on images in the “royal city” but provides no details in which one can have confidence: The extant letter has been severely interpolated.²⁵

The *acta* of II Nicaea (787; see below) have two letters allegedly sent by Gregory II to Leo III as well as a letter of Gregory to Patriarch Germanus.²⁶

23 Clemens Gantner, *Freunde Roms und Völker der Finsternis: Die päpstliche Konstruktion von Anderen in 8. Und 9. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: 2014), 26–27.

24 Francesca Dell’Acqua and Clemens Gantner, “Resenting Iconoclasm: Its Early Reception in Italy through an Inscription from Corteolona,” *Medieval Worlds* 9 (2019), 160–86. For the inscription itself see 162. I have discussed the legends in “Images and the Imaginary Jew in the Early Byzantine World,” in Yitzhak Hen and Thomas F. X. Noble (eds.), *Barbarians and Jews* (Turnhout: 2018), 322–24.

25 *Epistolae Langobardicae Collectae*, no. 13, ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH, Epistolae* 3, *Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi* 1 (Berlin: 1892), 703. For discussion see Dell’Acqua and Gantner, “Resenting Iconoclasm,” 175–76 with further literature, and Gantner, *Freunde Roms*, 108–109 and n. 369.

26 In his now definitive edition of the *acta* of II Nicaea Erich Lamberg omits the letters to Leo and prints the letter to Germanus while calling it a *dubium*: *Concilium Universale Nicaenum Secundum*, Pars Altera (Berlin: 2012), 431–42. Mansi, *Concilia*, prints both the letters to Leo and the letter to Germanus: vol. 12, cols 959–982, and vol. 13, cols. 91–99. I cite the essential literature on these letters in *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*,

These richly detailed documents would fill in many blanks if we could trust them. We cannot. If they are not outright forgeries they are so heavily interpolated that their testimony cannot be cited. The *acta* do have the perfectly genuine correspondence between Patriarch Germanos and three Bithynian bishops but no one in the West ever saw those letters. The letters prove that there had been some agitation against images, probably in the 720s.²⁷

Far off in the north of England Bede (673–735) incorporated some rather opaque references to events in Byzantium in his *Greater Chronicle*, a work he completed in 725, that almost certainly derive from the *Liber Pontificalis*.²⁸ Then in his book *On the Temple*, written between 727 and 729, he said “There are people who think we are prohibited by God’s law from carving or painting, in a church or any other place, representations of either humans or animals or objects of whatever kind, on the grounds that He said in the Ten Commandments ‘You shall not make.’”²⁹ What prompted him to say this? As noted, Bede knew the *Liber Pontificalis* and it seems that he had access to a copy of the *Liber Pontificalis* with an as yet unfinished *vita* of Gregory II.³⁰ The *vita* of Gregory II does say, a little more than half-way through, that Gregory wrote to Christians everywhere. Moreover, there was a pretty constant traffic between Anglo-Saxon England and Rome and Bede himself had a regular Roman informant in Nothelm.³¹

The Roman and Bedan accounts do not line up precisely. Bede knows of “Some people” but does not mention the emperor. Bede knows of the controversy’s having arisen as a perceived contravention of the Exodus prohibition. The *Liber Pontificalis* does not mention this. The *Liber Pontificalis* claims that Leo forbade images of saints, martyrs, and angels in churches. Bede has heard that there should be no painting or carving of humans, animals, or objects in churches or anywhere else. Liutprand knows something about a “schism.”

381–82, nn. 31 and 32. See also Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): The Sources* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs) 7 (Aldershot: 2001), 277.

27 See my *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: 2009), 56–57.

28 Bede, *On the Reckoning of Time*, trans. Faith Wallis (Translated Texts for Historians) 29 (Liverpool: 1999), pp. 234–35.

29 Bede, *De templo*, 2. 19. 10, ed. David Hurst, *CCCM* 119A (Turnhout: 1969), p. 212. I cite the translation of Sean Connolly, *Bede on the Temple*, (Translated Texts for Historians) 21 (Liverpool: 1995), 89–90. For the date of the work see Arthur G. Holder, “New Treasures and Old in Bede’s *De tabernaculo* and *De templo*,” *Revue bénédictine* 99 (1989), 237.

30 Raymond Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis)*, (Translated Texts for Historians) 13 (Liverpool: 1992), 2.

31 Paul Meyvaert, “Bede and the Church Paintings at Wearmouth Jarrow,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), 68.

Antonius of Grado was informed that something bad was happening in the Royal City. Evidently there was information circulating in the West whose contents and vectors are only dimly visible to us. The West had had no contention around religious art and had no reason to invent issues where none existed. Thus, the western evidence, no matter how slim the dossier, proves that something was going on in the East with respect to images in the mid- to late 720s and that reports had reached Rome.³²

The situation in the East continued to reverberate in Rome. The *vita* of Gregory II continues narrating strife in Italy and then says that the emperor was attempting to force his will on everyone, to take down images wherever they were, to burn images in the center of the city. Many people opposed the emperor so some were mutilated and others beheaded. Patriarch Germanus was deposed and Gregory refused to accept his successor.³³ Evidently as Gregory's biographer continued with his work additional information, or rumors, reached Rome from Constantinople. When Gregory III (731–741) succeeded to the papacy he immediately called a synod. With either seventy-nine (*Responsum*, see below) or ninety-three (*Liber Pontificalis*) bishops, this synod was the largest to have assembled in Rome in decades. The synod's records do not survive but the *Liber Pontificalis* says this: "He was bishop in the time of emperors Leo and Constantine, while there was raging the persecution they started for the removal and destruction of sacred images ... On behalf of these, just as his predecessor of sacred memory had done, this holy man sent written writings, with the authority of the apostolic see's teaching, for them to change their minds and quit their error." The synod decreed that, according to the *Liber Pontificalis*, "If anyone henceforth, despising the faithful use of those who hold the ancient custom of the church, should remove, destroy, profane, and blaspheme against this veneration of sacred images ... let him be driven forth from the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and from the unity and membership of the entire church."³⁴ At this point discussion of the image question breaks off. Some detective work in the records of a Roman synod of 769 and in the *Responsum* turns up the interesting fact that Gregory's synod prepared a dossier of image texts amounting to at least twelve citations from the Bible and from church fathers.³⁵ This was a novel step. The communications Gregory

32 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 86.

33 LP, vol. 1, 408–10.

34 LP, vol. 1, 415–16. I cite the translation of Davis, *Lives*, 19–20.

35 *Hadrianum*, 1. 5, 12, 2. 19, pp. 15, 19, 51. The letter is edited by Karl Hampe, *MGH, Epistolae* 5, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 3 (Berlin: 1899). I call it the *Responsum*. Roman Synod of 769: *MGH, Concilia Aevi Karolini*, ed. Albert Werminghoff (Hanover: 1906), vol. 1, 87. *Vita* of Stephen

circulated and those he sent to Constantinople do not survive so we have no way of knowing if the dossier was included in them.

The *Lives* of Zachary (741–752) and Stephen II (752–757) make absolutely no explicit mention of a controversy surrounding images. Zachary did not send the normal synodical letter to Patriarch Anastasius. Instead, he wrote to the Church of Constantinople.³⁶ Was this a rebuke of the patriarch who had replaced the ousted Germanus? It is striking that the *vita* of Stephen II makes no mention of the Council of Hieria held in 754. This impressive council, called by Emperor Constantine V, was the major event of the first phase of iconoclasm.³⁷ In the unusually short *vita* of Paul I (757–767) we read: “He strenuously defended the orthodox faith, which is why he frequently sent his envoys with apostolic letters to entreat and warn the emperors ... to restore and establish in their erstwhile status of veneration the sacred images.”

In the late 760s papal and Frankish involvement with Byzantium and images intensified. But it is worth taking a look back over the forty years from the 720s to the 760s. There was a momentary Anglo-Saxon engagement with the image question but no long-term involvement. The Lombards and the church of Grado were alert to the issue but if they took any action we do not know about it. The papacy was involved in the late 720s and early 730s but not again, apparently, until the mid-760s. The Franks were not involved at all until the mid-760s³⁸. Iconoclasm simply was not a major preoccupation of anyone in the West. There was some awareness of the basic issues – a topic I will take up in the last section of this essay. And iconoclasm was summarily dismissed as a heresy. As far as we know, there was no western controversy.

We might pause here and look at western textual and physical evidence for images in what we might call, cautiously, the first age of iconoclasm. According to the credible sections of the *Liber Pontificalis*, acknowledging that the text sustained interpolations, Gregory III installed a new oratory in St. Peter’s into which he placed a crowned and bejeweled image of Mary. He also put a gold image of Mary in Santa Maria Maggiore. He put “paintings” in San Crisogono and other churches. The exarch Eutychius, perhaps as a gesture of

III, LP, vol. 1, 477. I discuss all this and print the dossier in *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 119–24.

36 LP, vol. 1, 432.

37 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 189–97.

38 With one possible exception: If the Gundohinus Gospels (Autun, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 3) can be dated to 757 instead of 754, then it is possible that the creedal texts with which it begins represent some kind of a response to the Council of Hieria. See Lawrence Nees, *The Gundohinus Gospels* (Medieval Academy Books) 95 (Cambridge, MA: 1987).

reconciliation, sent Gregory six twisted onyx columns above which the pope placed a gilded beam surmounted with images. Pope Zachary (741–752) built a new triclinium and decorated it with mosaics and paintings (surely frescoes) and he may have placed a statue of Christ before the Lateran. Pope Paul I “decorated” a chapel of St. Petronilla next to St. Peter’s and other churches too. He put a statue of Mary in a chapel near St. Peter’s (not specified) and he installed a mosaic in San Silvestro in Capite.³⁹ Pope Honorius I (625–638) was a generous builder, renovator, and decorator of churches. He was himself wealthy and probably could also have drawn on the resources of the church’s patrimonies. Thereafter for more than a century Rome was relatively impoverished and we hear of little construction or renovation. Therefore, it seems that the accounts just mentioned of artistic patronage may legitimately be attributed to a counterblast to Byzantine iconoclasm – however dim our understanding may be of exactly what was happening in the East and of what was known about it in the West.

Another artistic phenomenon that emerged in the early 8th century and persisted well into the 9th, is certainly anti-Byzantine but may or may not be anti-iconoclast. For a long time the Byzantines, and especially the city of Constantinople, claimed Mary as a special protector. Pope Sergius I (687–701), who displayed anti-Byzantine sentiments on a number of occasions, organized the four great Marian feasts (Purification, Annunciation, Assumption, Nativity).⁴⁰ Subsequently popes began to place Marian images, indeed images of a kind called “Regina,” in many churches around Rome: St. Peter’s, Santa Maria in Trastevere, Santa Maria Antiqua, San Clemente, San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, Santa Susanna. The Maria Regina image presents the virgin clothed in a maphorion, enthroned, usually crowned, and bejeweled. The image is purposely regal. The point was crystal clear: To claim that Mary was the protectress and patron of Rome not of Byzantium or of Constantinople.⁴¹ That this claim was made by means of images at a time when images were under some duress in the East is unlikely to be a coincidence.

It comes as a surprise to read in the entry for 767 in the *Royal Frankish Annals* that “the Lord King Pippin in the above mentioned estate (Gentilly)

39 LP, I, 417–19, 421, 432, 464–65.

40 LP, I, 376.

41 Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 129–32. See also Ursula Nilgen, “Maria Regina – Ein Politischer Bildtypus?,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, 19 (1981), 3–33; John Osborne, “Images of the Mother of God in Early Medieval Rome,” in Anthony Eastmond and Liz James (eds.), *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies Presented to Robin Cormack* (London: 2003), 135–56.

held a great synod between the Romans and the Greeks about the Holy Trinity or about the images of the saints." This account was written around 790. A little over two decades later the "revised" annals tell the story a bit differently: "A dispute about the Holy Trinity and about the images of the saints having arisen between the eastern and western churches, that is between the Romans and the Greeks, King Pippin, having gathered together an assembly at Gentilly, held a synod concerning the dispute."⁴² Before moving on a few salient points deserve emphasis. Both accounts say that the controversy was between the Romans and the Greeks. Both say that Pippin set himself up as an arbiter in someone else's quarrel. Mention of the Holy Trinity need not detain us here; this refers to the so-called *filioque* dispute concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit that would recur several times in the next decades. As far as images are concerned, only images of the saints are mentioned. What is going on here?

Pippin campaigned twice in Italy, in 755 and 756, to secure the papacy against Lombard depredations. The Lombards never quite fulfilled their obligations and Pope Paul I in particular pressed Pippin repeatedly to live up to his promises. Pippin had other priorities, especially a grueling series of campaigns in Aquitaine.⁴³ As early as 757 Emperor Constantine V initiated a series of diplomatic efforts to get Pippin to give back to Byzantium Italian lands that the Lombards had seized and that Pippin had promised to St. Peter and the pope. In the mid-760s there was apparently some discussion of a marriage alliance between the Byzantine and Frankish courts. Pippin himself had usurped the Frankish throne in 751 so Byzantine recognition may well have been attractive but in the end Pippin's, and his family's, devotion to St. Peter won out. That is, Paul's letters say that the pope had been constantly pressing Constantine on the matter of images. It simply must be the case that Pippin decided to abandon attempts to align with Byzantium and instead strengthen his ties to papal Rome. Because the image question had previously gained no traction in the Frankish world, Pippin attached a synod to his annual assembly and summoned Byzantine and papal representatives to explain the issues. It is possible that Pippin put images on the agenda at Gentilly to gain clarification of

42 *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* 6 (Hanover: 1895), 24, 25. The annals and Carolingian historical writing generally are ably covered with the older literature by Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: 2004).

43 I treat all of this in detail in *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State 680–825* (Philadelphia: 1984), chs. 2 and 3.

the issues or perhaps the pope wanted the issue aired publicly so as to throw Byzantine heresy into sharp relief.⁴⁴

Two years later a significant synod convened in Rome. Paul I died in 767 and his decease was followed by a year or more of intense and bloody conflict in Rome. Finally Stephen III (768–772) secured his place as pope and decided to call a synod.⁴⁵ The *Liber Pontificalis* says that Stephen sent envoys to Pippin and his sons who arrived in Francia only to discover that Pippin had died. Anyway, Stephen's letter asked the Franks to send bishops who were knowledgeable in the scriptures, learned, and experienced in the rules of the canons. Twelve Frankish bishops did attend. The relevant passage says that the synod was to examine the events of the year 767. It does not mention images. The council itself met in four sessions in April of 769. The first two sessions examined the case of the papal usurper Constantine. The third day established some new and revised rules for electing popes. The fourth day addressed images. The council's records are not extant⁴⁶ so one must turn to the *Liber Pontificalis* which says that "diverse testimonies of the holy fathers concerning the sacred images of the Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ, and of Mary, the holy, glorious, and ever virgin mother of our Lord, and of the blessed apostles and all the saints and prophets and martyrs and confessors were laid before the council." The text goes on to say that the pope and the council fathers agreed that images were to be venerated and that the Council of Hieria ("the execrable synod recently held") was to be anathematized "for casting down images."⁴⁷ The West was now aligned securely against Byzantium. No rapprochement on the subject of images was possible. Gregory III seems to have anathematized Leo III, Patriarch Anastasius, and the iconoclasts. Now a major Byzantine council had been anathematized – there was no mention of Constantine V.

The image question went dormant in the West for more than twenty years. The one possible exception to this general rule is a massive iconophile florilegium that someone in Rome prepared around 770 and then the compiler or someone else revised it around 774. The texts may have been placed in the papal library and, as we shall see presently, Hadrian I in all probability drew

44 On all of this see my *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 140–45. The crucial source is *Codex Carolinus*, nos. 36, 37, ed. Wilhelm Gundlach, *MGH Epistolae 3, Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini Aevi 1* (Berlin: 1892), 543–50. My account here, and in *Images*, is indebted to Michael McCormick, "Textes, images et iconoclasm dans le cadre des relations entre Byzance et l'occident carolingien," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano*, 41 (1994), 95–158.

45 Noble, *Republic of St. Peter*, 112–16.

46 Werminghoff printed the surviving fragments: *MGH, Concilia*, vol. 2, 72–92.

47 LP, vol. 1, 473–77. Translations partly mine and partly Davis's, *Lives*, 95–100.

upon it in composing his *Hadrianum*.⁴⁸ This was the letter that Hadrian sent to Irene and Constantine VI shortly before 11 Nicaea.⁴⁹ The popes returned to their familiar policy of nagging the Franks about territorial issues in Italy and also to massive construction projects intended to repair Rome's secular and ecclesiastical fabric. The Carolingian-imposed *Pax Italiae* generated a prosperity unknown in and around Rome for many years. The Franks did in fact attend to Italian affairs but Charlemagne (768–814) devoted most of his time to wars on the Frankish frontiers and to reforms of his church and kingdom. Papal or Frankish relations with Byzantium were exiguous and the problem of images did not come up.

In 785 Empress Irene, acting as regent for her still-minor son Constantine VI decided to call a council to address the image question that had received scant attention since the Council of Hieria in 754. That council, 11 Nicaea, did not meet until 787 as a result of political strife in Constantinople.⁵⁰ Word reached Pope Hadrian and he immediately wrote to Irene and Constantine. His letter, the *Hadrianum*, permits, as noted above, recovery of some citations from the florilegia prepared in Rome in 731 and in or just after 769. The letter falls into two sections, one dealing with papal authority and one dealing with Hadrian's views on images. Hadrian's teaching on the subject of images will come up later in this essay. Suffice it now to say that he offered nothing original. His comments on papal authority are, however, significant. His basic argument is that Leo III and Constantine V fell into heresy precisely because they did not seek out and adhere to papal teaching. Hadrian discusses the story about Pope Sylvester's showing of an image of Saints Peter and Paul to Emperor Constantine I who right away affirmed that he had seen those very saints in a dream.⁵¹ For a number of writers in late antiquity and after that story was about the power of images. For Hadrian it was about the authority of Sylvester, Peter, and Paul. In the autumn of 787 Hadrian's legates to Nicaea, Peter the archpriest of the Roman Church and Peter the abbot of St.-Saba, returned to Rome with the *acta* of the council. It is interesting that Hadrian sent two men named Peter to advance the cause of the authority of Peter's vicar, for that is what Hadrian called himself in the *Hadrianum*. St Saba was perhaps the premier Greek monastery in Rome so its abbot was almost certainly bilingual.⁵² The pope was

48 Alexander Alexakis, *Codes Parisinus Graecus 115 and Its Archetype* (Washington: 1996).

49 *Concilium Universale Nicaenum Secundum*, ed. Lamberz, pars prima (Berlin: 2008), 118–75.

50 For the broad context see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 248–86.

51 *Hadrianum*, ed. Lamberz, xxx.

52 Guy Ferrari, *Early Roman Monasteries: Notes for the History of the Monasteries and Convents at Rome from the V through the X Century* (Studi di antichità Cristiana) 23

satisfied with the results of Nicaea where images were concerned: Hiereia was massively refuted and image veneration was restored. In the second part of the *Hadrianum* Hadrian took a minimalist stance on images. It is as if the pope had no intention of dealing in detail with what he and his predecessors had regarded as Byzantine heresy. Hadrian had the *acta* translated into Latin and placed in the papal library.⁵³ There the matter might have ended.

Around 788 the *acta* of 11 Nicaea reached Charlemagne's court. No Frankish or Roman sources supply any information on the transmission of the documents. The early-12th-century English annalist Symeon of Durham says that Charlemagne sent to England the "synodal book sent to him by Constantinople."⁵⁴ Charlemagne's key adviser, Alcuin of York, was in England 790–793 and it has always been assumed that the king sent him the records of Nicaea for review and assessment. Symeon says that Alcuin wrote a "letter marvelously buttressed by the authority of the divine scriptures" and sent it along with "that same book in the name of our bishops and nobles to the king of the Franks." That letter has vanished. Meanwhile at Charlemagne's court the Goth Theodulf was beginning the work long called the *Libri Carolini* but today more properly known as the *Opus Caroli Regis contra Synodum*.⁵⁵ That work was planned to have a preface and four books of thirty chapters each. In 792 Charlemagne sent Angilbert, another of his trusted advisers, to Pope Hadrian with a preliminary version of the *Opus Caroli* that apparently numbered eighty-five chapters. This work, the *Capitulare adversus synodum* as scholars name it, can be accurately reconstructed from Hadrian's long and angry refutation – a text I call the *Responsum* – which systematically rejects the *Capitulare* chapter by chapter.⁵⁶ Evidence from the Paris Colloquy of 825 shows that the

(Vatican City: 1957), 281–90; Jean-Marie Sansterre, *Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne* (Brussels: 1980), 74.

53 LP, vol. 1, 512. On the translation see now Lamberz, *Pars Altera*, xxxii–xxxv.

54 The passage has been published a number of times. See, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs (Oxford: 1871), vol. 3, 468–69. The standard translation is in Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042* (London: 1968), 247. On Symeon see *ibid.*, 118. See also Hanna Vollrath, *Die Synoden Englands bis 1066* (Paderborn: 1985), 179–81.

55 *Opus Caroli Regis contra Synodum (Libri Carolini)*, ed. Ann Freeman with Paul Meyvaert, *MGH, Concilia*, Tomus 11, Supplementum 1 (Hannover: 1998). For a thorough assessment see my "From the Libri Carolini to the Opus Caroli Regis," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 9 (1999), 131–47.

56 Hadrian, Ep. 2, ed. Karl Hampe (Berlin: 1899), *MGH, Epistolae* 5, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 3, 5–57.

Capitulare was read out in the presence of Charlemagne and some of his key advisers.⁵⁷

Theodulf continued working on the *Opus*. His actual working draft, now MS Vaticanus Latinus 7207, survives. Although it lacks the preface, the opening of book one, and all of book four, it still contains more than 3,400 corrections. The full text is preserved in a 9th-century manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 663).⁵⁸ The meticulous research of the late Ann Freeman reveals something interesting about the shape of the Vatican manuscript. The quality of the parchment and of the script, and also of the corrections, maintain a high standard up to Book 3 chapter 13 and after that all standards deteriorate. The contents of the work also seem to have suffered from some disruption. The general preface survives along with the prefaces to each of the four books. Yet the books have 30, 31, 31, and 28 chapters. Moreover, books one and two, and the opening of book three are more coherently organized and rigorously argued than the rest of book three and all of book four.⁵⁹ There are at least two ways to think about changes in the manuscript and in the text. Some scholars suggest that when Charlemagne sent the *acta* to England (assuming that he actually did so!) Theodulf was reduced to working with notes and extracts and that after Alcuin returned in 793 with the whole text Theodulf began going back over his earlier work and revising it.⁶⁰ Then, perhaps, Hadrian's disappointing *Responsum* reached the court, probably some time in late 793 or early 794 and effectively shut down the project. The *Opus Caroli Regis*, despite its learning and arguments, was shelved. There is no evidence that it was ever disseminated or that it exerted any influence in later times.⁶¹ What it actually says about images will occupy us later in this essay.

The aftermath of the reception of the Nicene *acta* in the West prompts two reflections. First, how did the Franks and Pope Hadrian become so opposed to

57 MGH, *Concilia*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 481.

58 On the manuscripts see Freeman, *Opus Caroli Regis*, "Einleitung," 67–76.

59 Ann Freeman, "Carolingian Orthodoxy and the Fate of the *Libri Carolini*," *Viator* 16 (1985), 65–108, esp. 86ff. I discuss these issues with further literature in *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 162–69.

60 Pascal Weitmänn, *Sukzession und Gegenwart: Zu theoretischen Äußerungen über bildende Künste und Musik von Basileios bis Hrabanus Maurus* (Spätantike – Frühes Christentum – Byzanz: Kunst im ersten Jahrtausend), ed. Beat Brenk et al. (Wiesbaden: 1997), 181–82; Stephen Gero, "The *Libri Carolini* and the Image Controversy," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 18 (1973), 7–34, esp. 11–13; Freeman, "Einleitung," 7–8 and "Carolingian Orthodoxy," 86–87; Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 162–63.

61 Paul Meyvaert, "Medieval Notions of Publication: The 'Unpublished' *Opus Caroli Regis contra synodum* and the Council of Frankfurt," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 12 (2002), 81–89.

each other in the 790s when there is no hint that the twelve Frankish bishops who attended the Roman Council of 769 were at that time out of step with their Roman counterparts? Second, given the disagreement between the Franks and Hadrian, what could the Franks do?

Symeon of Durham says that the “synodal book” that Charlemagne sent to England possessed “many things improper and contrary to the true faith, especially that it had been asserted with the unanimous consent of nearly all the scholars of the East, no fewer – rather more, in fact – than 300 bishops, that images ought to be adored, which the church of God utterly abhors.”⁶² There is no way of ascertaining where Symeon got that information but it does in fact accord well with some of the central arguments of the *Opus Caroli Regis*. What Symeon does not say is that the *Opus* is a searing anti-Byzantine polemic. The Carolingian court maintained fairly intense diplomacy with the Byzantines in the 780s and it may be that the Franks gradually learned that the Byzantines embraced positions on images that they themselves did not.⁶³ What is more, in the years between 785 and 795 the Franks began to define themselves as the unique heirs to biblical faith and to Christian Rome.⁶⁴ The *Opus Caroli Regis* expressed the Frankish *via media* on images: They were neither to be destroyed nor worshiped.⁶⁵ But the fundamental character of the *Opus* was its stinging attack on Byzantine culture, religion, and rulership. The Franks had had no previous occasion to discuss the issue of images with Hadrian and in 769 the Franks and the pope were in complete agreement that iconoclasm was a heresy so it seems reasonable to suppose that his opposition to the *Capitulare* came as a complete shock. Until Angilbert returned from Rome the Franks may not have known that Hadrian had enthusiastically approved the work of II Nicaea.

The Franks held a major council at Frankfurt in 794. Of all the councils, or assemblies, held during Charlemagne’s royal years, Frankfurt was the most important and comprehensive. There were papal legates present at Frankfurt

62 See above n. 54.

63 McCormick, “Textes, images et iconoclisme,” 134–36; Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 160–62.

64 Noble, “Tradition and Learning in Search of Ideology: The *Libri Carolini*,” in Richard E. Sullivan (ed.), *“The Gentle Voices of Teachers”: Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age* (Columbus, Ohio: 1995), 227–60 and “From Brigandage to Justice: Charlemagne 785–794,” in Celia Chazelle (ed.), *Literacy, Politics, and Artistic Innovation in the early Middle Ages* (Lanham, MD: 1992), 49–75. These studies were preparatory to my much longer discussion in *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 207–43.

65 Noble, “Neither Iconoclasm nor Iconodulia: The Carolingian *Via Media*,” in Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac (eds.), *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to Modernity* (Farnham: 2014), 95–105.

and the Franks pulled their punches so to speak. That is, the second canon (of fifty-six) says: "The question of the recent synod of the Greeks, which was held in Constantinople for the adoration of images, was entered into the discussion; one finds written there that they who do not pay to images of the saints the same service of adoration as to the divine Trinity are bound by anathema; our above mentioned most holy fathers, utterly rejecting such adoration and service, hate it and agree in condemning it."⁶⁶ At Nicaea Bishop Constantine of Constantia in Cyprus had explicitly said that images were not to be paid the service or adoration paid to the holy Trinity.⁶⁷ Somehow this statement, itself a refutation of things said at Hiëreia, was garbled in transmission, perhaps in the hasty Latin translation sent to the Frankish court. The key point is that in the only public statement made by the Carolingians about 11 Nicaea a single, and inaccurate, statement from the massive records of that council was refuted and permitted to stand for the whole. One senses that the Carolingians did not budge on images but also tried to avoid antagonizing Hadrian's envoys. The primary Carolingian annalistic account of Frankfurt says only that the Adoptionism of Felix of Urgel was condemned. A later hand interpolated some comments that more fully represent the Carolingians' view: "The pseudo-synod of the Greeks, which they held for the adoration of images and which they falsely call the seventh, was rejected by the bishops."⁶⁸ This brief statement does two kinds of work: It affirms the Frankish rejection of 11 Nicaea and it takes one more polemical slap at Byzantium.

Images then largely fell off the Western agenda for a generation. To be sure, Byzantium returned to iconoclasm, albeit in a milder fashion, in 815.⁶⁹ This produced some rather faint echoes in the West. Emperor Leo V exiled both Patriarch Nicephorus and Hìgoumen Theodore of Studion, among other supporters of images. Theodore seems to have maintained an extensive correspondence⁷⁰ despite his exile and he wrote to Pope Paschal I (817–824). He had written to Pope Leo III (795–816) some years before to enlist his help during the so-called Moechian Affair – the problem occasioned by Patriarch Tarasius's blessing of the "adulterous" marriage of Constantine VI. Theodore's letter was unusually solicitous of the pope and went much further than any other contemporary Byzantine writer in exalting papal authority.⁷¹ His letters to Paschal

66 *Capitulare Francofurtense*, MGH, *Concilia*, vol. 2, pt. 1, ed. Werminghoff, 165–71, canon 2, p. 165.

67 *Concilium Univerale Niceanum Secundum*, *Actio Tertia*, ed. Lamberz, Pars Prima, 270.

68 *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. Kurze, anno 794, 94.

69 Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 366–92.

70 See Roman Cholij, *Theodore the Studite: The Ordering of Holiness* (Oxford: 2002), 59–60.

71 Epp. 1.33, 34, PG 99: 1017B–1021A, 1021B–1028C. See Cholij, *Theodore the Studite*, 53.

are likewise full of fine words about papal authority. Doubtless Theodore was keen to win the pope's support against Leo v in the matter of iconoclasm.⁷² In fact, Paschal did write to Leo (see below) and a letter of Theodore's suggests that he was well pleased with the pope's attempted intervention.⁷³ Theodore also wrote to the higoumen of St. Saba in Rome, a Greek monastery that long maintained ties with the papacy – Peter of St. Saba had been one of Hadrian's envoys to Constantinople in 785.⁷⁴ The *vita* of the future patriarch, Methodius, says that when iconoclasm was renewed he went to Rome.⁷⁵ He may have been a key informant for Paschal about affairs in the East. The *vita* also says that when Michael II succeeded Leo v in 820 Paschal gave Methodius "books of doctrine" for the emperor.⁷⁶ On the one hand, then, it appears that the papacy learned about and responded to Second Iconoclasm. On the other hand, we have only some scattered correspondence to go on; no narrative source, not even the *Liber Pontificalis*, makes any mention at all of Second Iconoclasm.

Paschal's letter survives in a fragmentary condition.⁷⁷ In its present state it lacks formal opening and closing material and several rather abrupt shifts in the body of the letter suggest that material has dropped out. It is not widely known, especially among historians of the West.⁷⁸ The letter itself can only be dated between January 25, 817, when Paschal became pope and December 25, 820 when Leo v was murdered. I will return to Paschal's teaching on images later in this essay. For the present, it is enough to say that he appears to have

72 Epp. 2.12, 13, *PG* 99: 1152B–1153C, 1153C–1156C.

73 Ep. 2.63, *PG* 99: 1281A–1284C. On Theodore's relations with Rome see: Thomas Pratsch, *Theodoros Studites (759–826) zwischen Dogma und Pragma*, (Berliner byzantinische Studien) 4 (Frankfurt: 1998), 175–78, 253–54; Charles van der Vorst, "Les relations de S. Theodore Studite avec Rome," *Analecta Bollandiana* 32 (1913), 439–47; Venance Grumel, "Quelques témoignages byzantines sur la primauté romaine," *Echos d'Orient* 30 (1931), 422–30; Jean Gouillard, "L'Église d'Orient et le primauté romaine au temps de l'iconoclisme," *Istina* 21 (1976), 25–54, esp. 46–53; Evelyne Patlagean, "Les Stoudites, l'empereur et Rome: Figure byzantine d'un monachisme réformateur," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano sull'alto medioevo* 34 (1988), 429–60.

74 Ep. 1.35, *PG* 99: 1028C–1032A, esp. 1029C.

75 *Vita Methodii*, ch. 4, *PG* 100: 1248A–B.

76 *Ibid.*, ch. 5, 1248B–C.

77 *Epistola ad Leonem V*, ed. Giovanni Mercati, "La lettera di Pasquale I ad Leone V sul culto delle sacre immagini," in his *Note di letteratura biblica e Cristiana* (Studi e testi) 5 (Rome: 1901), 227–35. Mercati worked with an Ambrosiana manuscript. The letter had been published from a now lost Roman manuscript by J. B. Pitra, *Epistola ad Leonem V*, in his *Iuris ecclesiastici Graecorum historia et monumenta* (Rome: 1868), vol. 2, xi–xvii.

78 I discuss the letter in *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 257–60. See also Erik Thunø, *Image and Relic: Mediating the Sacred in Early Medieval Rome* (Analecta Romana Instituti Danici) Supplementum 32 (Rome: 2002), 135–40.

been very well informed about what had transpired at Constantinople in 815. In only one or two respects did Paschal break new ground but his letter is an articulate and sophisticated point-by-point refutation of current Byzantine iconophobia. There is no evidence that Byzantium responded to Paschal or that he ever returned to the subject.

The pontificates of Leo III and Paschal I are interesting with respect to images. Leo constructed two triclinia in the Lateran area. The second, with an apse and five flanking conches, was erected after 803. Its decorations are unknown but the building was probably intended to “quote” the chamber of nineteen couches in the imperial palace of Constantinople.⁷⁹ The first triclinium, however, almost certainly in place by 798, had gorgeous mosaics with powerful ideological and ecclesiological significance. Bearing in mind that we need to contend with Cardinal Francesco Barberini’s reconstruction in the 17th century, we may suggest that the apsidal arch had images to its left and right. On the left an enthroned Peter presents Leo, to his right, with a pallium, and Charlemagne, to his left, with a banner. It is worth bearing in mind that Charlemagne probably dined in this room when he visited Rome in 800 before his imperial coronation. To the right of the arch we see Jesus giving keys to St. Peter and a banner to Constantine.⁸⁰ The stress here on papal and Petrine authority is unmistakable but there is no reason to connect these images to Byzantine iconoclasm. Paschal appears with an enthroned virgin in Santa Maria in Domnica – the grandest of the “Maria Regina” images – with a Pantocrator in the apse of Santa Prassede, and with Christ and various saints in Santa Cecilia in Trastevere. Indeed, Paschal’s whole program of mosaics in the Zeno Chapel of Santa Prassede, dedicated to his mother, is one of the great achievements of early medieval art. Still, and despite his letter to the emperor, there is no reason to connect these images to Byzantine iconoclasm. These images are all about projecting papal authority in Rome and the West.⁸¹

The first hint we have that the Franks were about to be involved again in an image controversy appears in the *Royal Frankish Annals* under the year 824. The account is slightly confusing but basically says that envoys from Michael appeared at Louis’s court bearing presents and letters and a desire to ratify peace. Michael’s envoys also raised the matter of images about which they

79 Hans Belting, “Die beiden Palastaulen Leos III. und die Entstehung einer päpstlichen Programmkunst,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 12 (1978), 5–83.

80 Belting, “Palastaulen,” 65–66; Noble, “The Making of a Papal Rome,” in Mayke de Jong and Frans Theuvs (eds.), *Topographies of Power in the early Middle Ages* (The Transformation of the Roman World) 6 (Leiden: 2001), 68–69.

81 Outstanding is Caroline Goodson, *The Rome of Pope Paschal I* (Cambridge: 2010).

were to proceed to the apostolic see. The annal says that Louis dismissed them and ordered them to be taken to Rome.⁸² At least two things are interesting about this report. First, the Franks and the Byzantines had had fairly frequent diplomatic exchanges for some years before 824. It is reasonable to wonder how much the Franks knew about the death – read murder – of Leo v and about new iconoclasm. Second, we actually have Michael's letter – at least we have a Latin version of it.

In the context of this essay Michael's letter is an interesting document for many reasons.⁸³ In the standard edition the letter is 184 lines long. The question of images does not appear until line 127. Michael stresses not theological objections to images but instead specific practices such as casting crosses out of churches and replacing them with images, placing incense burning lamps before images, paying to images the devotion due only to the cross, singing psalms before images and asking them for help, wrapping images in linen cloths and making them sponsors of children at baptism, receiving upon them clippings from a boy's first haircut or from a monk's tonsuring, or taking communion from a cup with image scrapings in it. All this having been said, one wonders in light of Byzantine-Frankish diplomatic exchanges from the 790s to the 820s, whether Byzantium knew that they and the Franks were actually closer on certain image practices and devotions than Rome and Francia were. Indeed, there is absolutely no evidence for any of the practices detailed in Michael's letter ever having been present in the Frankish world. Michael's letter also speaks of a "local council" that had objected to image practices. This must refer to a council of 821 whose canons do not survive and whose relation to the Council of Constantinople of 815 can only be guessed at from Michael's letter. Michael's use of the word *local* implies that he was discretely avoiding claiming ecumenical authority for the council of 815. Michael also says that some people who reject "local councils" have taken up residence in "Old Rome." He goes on to assert his loyalty to the six ecumenical councils and he adds a profession of faith that excludes the *filioque*. Subtly, perhaps, Michael skips over 11 Nicaea (which ought to have been the seventh council) and the *filioque*, which had been a bone of contention between the Franks and the Greeks since Gentilly.

We have in the standard modern edition a total of seven documents that constitute Louis the Pious's response to Michael's letter.⁸⁴ These are: The letter

82 *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. Kurze, sub anno 824, 165.

83 *MGH, Concilia*, ed. Werminghoff, vol. 2, pt. 2, 475–80. The letter is dated April 10, 824.

84 *MGH, Concilia*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 475–551. See in general Wilfried Hartmann, *Die Synoden der Karolingerzeit im Frankreich und in Italien* (Paderborn: 1989), 168–71.

of Michael II and his son Theophilus to Louis; the *Libellus Synodalis* containing the Frankish reflections on the question of images; a letter of Louis to his envoys to Rome on how to comport themselves in the pope's presence; a letter of Louis and his son Lothair to Pope Eugenius II, and an Epitome of the *Libellus*; a letter which the Paris synodalists proposed to Louis to send to the pope; and a letter which the Paris synodalists hoped the pope would send to Constantinople.

Who were these Paris synodalists and how does this matter? The standard edition and all of the scholarship refer to a "Council of Paris" but the assembly in Paris was not a council. The surviving documents use the word *conventum*. The document pertaining to the Frankish visit to Rome explicitly says that they did not ask to hold a *synodum*. Louis asked a very small number of his key advisers and theological experts to assemble in Paris. The *Libellus* says that Freulf (bishop of Lisieux) and Adegar (otherwise unknown) went to Rome to consult with the pope and that Freulf explained to the Paris bishops *viva voce* what he had said and learned in Rome. Modoin of Autun was to have been present but was prevented by illness from attending. Bishops Halitgar of Cambrai and Amalar of Metz were deputed to carry the gathering's findings to Louis. Presumably they were present. Louis wrote to Jeremias of Sens and Jonas of Orleans to advise them on how to present the Franks' views to the pope. One assumes that they were present. This is exactly how the Franks dealt with II Nicaea, with Adoptionism, with the *Filioque* issue (in 809), with Baptism, and how they would deal with issues of the Eucharist and Predestination later in the century. That is, the Franks either asked a small number of people to assemble and reflect on a subject or else asked a select group to report to the palace.⁸⁵

The bishops began their meeting in Paris on November 1 and sent the *Libellus* to Louis on December 6. By any measure they accomplished a large amount of work in a short period of time. Some of the bishops apparently did not know why they had been summoned to meet in Paris. This means that they could not have packed their bags with lots of relevant texts. The quantity of Patristic material reviewed by the bishops was huge so they must have had

85 See my "Kings, Clergy, and Dogma: The Settlement of Doctrinal Disputes in the Carolingian World," in Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov, Janet L. Nelson, and David Pelteret (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham: 2009), 235–52. On baptism see Susan A. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire*, 2 vols (Notre Dame: 2002). Vol. 2 contains 61 texts solicited by the court. For the general context see Owen Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford: 2014).

access to a fine library. Saint-Denis is a possibility but we really have no idea where they got their information.⁸⁶

When the *Libellus* reached Louis he had it read out in his presence. This is reminiscent of the reading of the *Opus Caroli Regis* in Charlemagne's presence in the winter of 793–794. Louis then entrusted Jeremias and Jonas with a letter for Pope Eugenius and in his letter to the two Frankish bishops he told them to insist that Franks be included in any papal embassy to Constantinople and he offered some advice. He told them to read out to the pope only a part of what had been collected and written at Paris and to be patient and courteous in the coming “disputation.” The document called the “Epitome” must be what Louis told them to read out and discuss in the pope's presence. We do not know what sort of meeting Angilbert had with Hadrian in 792 but Adalhard did indeed present to Pope Leo III (795–816) and argue with him about a document pertaining to the *filioque* controversy in 809.⁸⁷ We see once again the Carolingian tradition operating in a doctrinal case. In advance of a fuller discussion of the teaching of the Paris *Libellus*, three points may be made. First, the Carolingians again affirmed their fundamental conviction that images were neither to be adored nor destroyed. Second, the Franks were pretty hard on Pope Hadrian. They said that some of his teachings were heretical – they must have had access to his *Responsum* – although they did allow that his errors might have been inadvertent.⁸⁸ Third, whereas the *Opus Caroli Regis* was, among other things, a massive anti-Byzantine polemic, the *Libellus* is gentle and fraternal. Its tone is a bit condescending but it is never nasty. At this point, the trail goes cold. Not a scrap of evidence survives about either the Frankish embassy to Rome, a papal embassy to Constantinople, or any further communication with Byzantium.

Images continued for a time to be discussed in the Carolingian world. As we saw at the outset of this essay, Jonas of Orleans and Dungal of Pavia wrote lengthy treatises refuting the iconoclasm of Bishop Claudius of Turin. In the 820s Archbishop Agobard of Lyon wrote a little book “On Pictures and Images.” This book was for a long time thought to have been a reply to Claudius but that seems not to have been the case.⁸⁹ Agobard was more rigorist on images than

86 *Libellus*, 483.

87 *Ratio Romana*, ed. Harald Willjung, *MGH, Concilia*, Tomus 11, Supplementum 11 (Hanover: 1998), 287–94.

88 *Libellus*, 481, 482.

89 I long believed that Agobard's little book was a response to Claudius, but I now no longer think so. See Joshua O'Brien, “Locating Authorities in Carolingian Image Veneration: The Case of Agobard of Lyon's *De picturis et imaginibus*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 62 (2011), 176–206.

the Paris colloquists so perhaps his book was a reply to Paris; and maybe it was born of pique because he was not invited to Paris. In addition to his magnificent *carmina figurata*, which both *are* images and *talk about* images, Hrabanus Maurus occasionally expressed himself on the subject. Einhard responded to a query from Lupus of Ferrières to explain why the cross was worthy of veneration. Finally, Walahfrid Strabo, in the midst of his lengthy and learned liturgical commentary, offered a brief history of image quarrels going back to the 720s. He provides no new information but does reveal that the topic of images retained some interest in the Frankish world.⁹⁰ The key point here, in the context of the present essay, is that these Frankish discussions were not prompted by Byzantium as had been the case earlier.

Byzantium and images came up in the West one more time. In 832 Emperor Theophilus issued a decree against icons – idols to him – and when he died in 842 the eunuch Theoktistus persuaded Empress Theodora to restore images. Instead of calling a synod, which would have been a risky proposition given that virtually all bishops had been iconophobes, perhaps iconoclasts, since 815, a small group met in the house of Theoktistus and decided to accept the decisions of 11 Nicaea. The patriarch, John the Grammarian, was deposed and replaced by the long-exiled monk Methodius. Methodius deposed a good many iconoclast bishops but, apparently, sought to reconcile some others. When he died in 847 Ignatius was elected in his place. Ignatius was more of a rigorist on the question of images and he refused to accept one bishop, Gregory Asbestos of Syracuse, who appealed to Pope Leo IV (847–855). One supposes that it was at this point that the papacy learned of the political and religious developments in Byzantium in recent years. At any rate, no papal, or indeed Western, source mentions any of the developments I have just recorded.⁹¹

As always with the issue of images, to get to the West, one has to start in the East. In 856 Michael III dismissed his mother Theodora and also Theoktistus from court and began to assert himself. In 857 he dismissed Ignatius and replaced him with the layman Photius. The *Liber Pontificalis* has a rather odd account of these developments:

90 Fully discussed in Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 320–28, 347–51.

91 For basic details see Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: 1997), 446–55. There is perhaps an exception concerning western sources. In its *vita* of Nicholas I, LP, vol. 2, 154 says that Emperor Michael sent gifts to St. Peter through Methodius and others. Michael was born in 840 and was thus an infant when Theophilus died. Methodius became patriarch in 843 at which time Leo IV was pope. This garbled account merely shows that there was traffic between Rome and Constantinople but it does not tell us when or much about its purpose(s).

Now the emperor of the Greeks, having found an opportunity through the removers of sacred images, requested by his said envoys that the apostolic see send its envoys to Constantinople, intent as he as on the matter of the patriarch Ignatius and of Photius the intruder into the church of Constantinople. In this way he wanted – cunningly and jealously as it later appeared – this Ignatius to be condemned by the judgment of the apostolic see, and to replace him in that church by the neophyte Photius.⁹²

This curious statement provides the first Western signal of the opening of the Photian Schism that would aggravate both religious and political relations between Rome and Constantinople for a decade until 867 when Basil I murdered Michael III, deposed Photius, and restored Ignatius.⁹³ My focus here is on images and not on the broader history of the schism.

In 860 Michael sent envoys to Nicholas and then the pope wrote to Michael⁹⁴ and to Photios.⁹⁵ He told Michael that it was illegitimate to hold a synod without the expressed approval of the pope, to depose Ignatius, and to elevate Photius from the laity. He provided a brief history of these issues in the church. He also said that Pope Hadrian had already said all that needed to be said on the subject of images. He told Photius that he rejoiced at his orthodox profession of faith but objected to his elevation to the patriarchate. His letters further stated that he would be sending his legates, Bishops Radoald of Porto and Zacharias of Anagni, to Constantinople to inform themselves, so that they could inform him, of all that had transpired. The *Liber Pontificalis* mentions Michael's approach to Nicholas and the pope's decision to send legates to Constantinople.⁹⁶ A bit later the *Liber Pontificalis* mentions some further correspondence by Nicholas but does not mention the two letters just referenced here. Nicholas's *vita* makes no further mention of images.

Michael held a synod in Constantinople in 861 that affirmed the elevation of Photius. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Radoald and Zacharias were bribed to accept the synod's decision and to recognize Photius. Zacharias was subsequently deposed and Radoald refused to appear to receive a similar sentence

92 LP, vol. 2, 155. I cite the translation of Davis, *Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes* (Liverpool: 1995), 212.

93 Never superseded except in minor details is Francis Dvornik, *The Photian Schism: History and Legend* (Cambridge: 1948).

94 Ep. 82, ed. Ernst Perels, *MGH, Epistolae* 6, *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* 4 (Berlin: 1925), 433–39.

95 Ep. 83, ed. Perels, *MGH, Epistolae* 6, 440–42.

96 LP, vol. 2, 158–59.

in a synod held in Rome in 863 where the pope said he would never accept Photius.⁹⁷ Nicholas wrote again to Michael⁹⁸ and to Photius⁹⁹ stressing the illegitimacy of Photius's elevation and papal authority. In the letter to Michael images are mentioned in passing as a long-standing tradition of the church. In 866 Michael wrote a sharply worded letter to Nicholas that said Ignatius had been twice condemned and that Nicholas had no authority over the case and needed to accept the facts on the ground. Michael even made a number of ugly comments about the barbaric Latin language. Nicholas responded with a long, long letter that displayed the pope's rhetorical gifts burning white-hot. Deeply embedded in the text are a few lines about images but the bulk of the letter builds up a strong claim for papal authority based on a detailed history of the church reaching back well into antiquity.¹⁰⁰ Later in 866 Nicholas unleashed an epistolary barrage: he wrote again at length to Michael, to Photius, to Bardas (Theodora's brother), to Ignatius, to Theodora, to Eudocia (Michael's wife), to the senators of Constantinople, to the archbishops and metropolitans of the East, and to adherents of the Roman Church in North Africa and Asia. One letter to Michael wants to know what has been done in the East with respect to images. The letter to the Eastern primates says it is important to teach that holy and venerable images should remain pure and undamaged. The other items in this sheaf of letters make no mention at all of images.¹⁰¹ Nicholas also took the unprecedented step of writing to the Franks to enlist their help. He wrote to Archbishop Hincmar of Reims, the nominal head of the Western clergy, as well as to Charles the Bald, king of the West Franks and to Louis the German, king of the East Franks.¹⁰² Interestingly, Nicholas did not put the subject of images on the agenda in his correspondence with the Franks and in the surviving Frankish replies to Nicholas's letters there is not a word about images.¹⁰³ Papal authority, good order in the church, the *filioque*, leavened bread, and Friday fasting were the kinds of issues raised in the papal correspondence and in its replies.

97 Ibid. On the synodal activity of these years see Hartmann, *Synoden*, 286–93. The canons of Nicholas's 863 council may be found in his letters 91 (ed. Perels, 512–33) and 98 (ed. Perels, 553–65).

98 Ep. 85, ed. Perels, *MGH, Epistolae* 6, 443–46.

99 Ep. 86, ed. Perels, *MGH, Epistolae* 6, 447–51.

100 Ep. 88, ed. Perels, *MGH, Epistolae* 6, 454–87.

101 Epp. 90–98, ed. Perels, 488–565.

102 Epp. 100–102, ed. Perels, 608–610.

103 Ratramnus of Corbie, *Contra graecorum opposita*, PL 121: 223–346; Aeneas of Paris, *Liber adversus Graecos*, PL 121: 685–762; *Responsis episcoporum Germaniae de fide sancta Trinitatis*, PL 119: 1201–12.

Where the West is concerned, one fairly simple point may be made. The overwhelming volume of scholarship on western painting – about mosaics, outside Rome, we know very little – pertains to book art. But the largest amount of painting by far was on the walls of churches. Comparatively little of this painting survives but the great scholar Wolfgang Braunfels said that the Carolingians would have regarded as unfinished any church that was not painted.¹⁰⁴ In short, ordinary people in the Carolingian world – one thinks back to the people whose devotions aggravated Claudius of Turin – saw images constantly. Those prolific images were not anti-Byzantine or anti-iconoclastic. They were an ordinary element of Western devotion. Did people adore them? Venerate them? We simply cannot know or, at any rate, we cannot know for certain what they did.

This story has almost reached its end. After Basil I murdered Michael III and deposed Photius in 867 the Roman see passed from the hands of Nicholas I to those of Hadrian II (867–872). In 869 he called a council that condemned Photius and all his works.¹⁰⁵ He also received envoys from Basil and Ignatius and sent letters to both of them.¹⁰⁶ The letters rejoice in the new situation in Constantinople and repeat a great deal of what Nicholas had already written. They do not mention images. Late in 869 and early in 870 Basil and Ignatius held a council in Constantinople that attended to an array of routine ecclesiastical business, affirmed papal authority in a way unprecedented for eastern councils, and in its third canon, asserted that the sacred image of Christ should be venerated with honor equal to that accorded to the Gospels. Interestingly, images of Mary and the saints are not mentioned.¹⁰⁷

Neither Nicholas nor Hadrian broke any new ground on the subject of images. It seems as though the popes, especially Nicholas, never really had any clear idea of how images figured in the political and ecclesiastical battles that were disturbing the Byzantine Empire. One gets the impression that Nicholas thought Ignatius was more favorably disposed towards images than Photius was. Be that as it may, Nicholas was always more concerned about papal authority than he was about images. It seems that by the middle decades of

104 Wolfgang Braunfels, "Die Wandmalerei," in idem, *Karl der Grosse: Werk und Wirkung* (Aachen: 1965), 475; Noble, *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 338–40.

105 Hartmann, *Synoden*, 290–92.

106 Hadrian II, Epp. 37, 38, 39, ed. Perels, *Epistolae* 6, 747–54. The basic details are recorded by the *vita* of Hadrian II with, again, no mention of images: LP, vol. 2, 177–79.

107 Constantinople IV, in Norman P. Tanner SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London: 1990), vol. 1, 160–86. For affirmations of papal authority see pp. 164–65, 167, 171, 182. For canon 3 see 168.

the 9th century the image controversy had run out of steam. And yet, some of the political and ecclesiological problems in which the image controversy had been ensnarled were as troublesome as ever.



Bearing in mind that there is no reason to think that without Byzantine inducements to do so anyone in the West would have discussed sacred art, it remains to see what Western writers actually did say on the subject. After a brief look at Bede, our focus will rest on papal and Frankish writers. It may be helpful to have a quick look at what might be considered the raw materials for discussions of sacred art. Beginning in the 4th century, as Christianity became both licit and increasingly widespread, a distinctive Christian art emerged and provoked discussion that was sometimes supportive and sometimes critical.¹⁰⁸

Late antiquity saw the articulation of seven basic arguments in support of Christian figural art. Quite remarkably, these arguments have retained currency in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches to this day. First, in a homily on the Holy Spirit, St. Basil said that if a person looks at an image of the emperor he does not say that there are two emperors. Instead, that person honors the emperor whose image he views. His point is that in looking at a Christian image a person honors (or venerates) the person depicted. This is the “referential” argument. Second, Gregory of Nyssa once spoke of an image of the sacrifice of Isaac that always made him weep. His point is that an image could evoke salutary emotions. Third, Gregory also said that painting is like writing indeed like living writing. He was the first to equate verbal and pictorial eloquence. This argument could be extended to mean that images were useful to memory. Fourth, John of Thessalonica said in the 7th century that Christ could be depicted because he had appeared on earth among men as a man (the “argument from incarnation”). Fifth, Leontius of Neapolis in Cyprus, amidst a series of viciously anti-Jewish homilies, said that images were permissible because God himself had commanded certain images to be made (he referred to Moses’ putting cherubim on the ark and to Ezechiel’s and Solomon’s decoration of the temple). Sixth, Pseudo-Denys said that images had the capacity to elevate men’s minds from earthly realities to higher things. Seventh, and perhaps most famously, Pope Gregory I had said that images permit those without

108 I summarize the views on both sides of this issue, with the sources and literature, in *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 12–18 and 61–64.

letters to share knowledge with those who have letters (he was in this partly anticipated by Paulinus of Nola).

There were fewer arguments against Christian figural art but like those in favor of such art they have proved to be durable. First, Epiphanius of Salamis basically equated images of the saints with the idols of the pagan gods. Essentially, he took a hardline position on the "Exodus Prohibition" (Ex 20.4). Second, Nilus of Sinai said that on the walls of churches only crosses were permissible but that bare walls were preferable. Third, Philoxenus of Mabbug said that assigning corporeal bodies to angels or to Christ violated John's command to worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). In the 8th century the iconoclasts added some more objections. First, Constantine V argued that an image should be consubstantial with what it represented (an attempt to refute the referential argument and the argument from incarnation). Second, the Council of Hieria argued that making images of Christ either separated his divine and human nature, or circumscribed his divinity into one nature, condemned respectively as Nestorian and Monophysite. The true image of Christ was the Eucharist. Thirdly, they developed the "ethical argument": no image could actually generate holy behavior; only a text could do this. From time to time, opponents of sacred art also complained about the "dross" or "vile" matter of which images were made; such matter could not bear any relationship with transcendent realities.

I begin with Bede. In several of his works he took sheer delight in describing art but his comments on art's validity are fewer and more restricted. In particular in his book *On the Temple* he said that art is permitted because God himself commanded that certain images be made. Bede also said that images could produce compunction. Finally, he said that images could do for the illiterate what books did for the literate. The first two arguments embraced by Bede must have enjoyed some currency because it is highly unlikely that Bede knew Gregory of Nyssa or Leontius. On the other hand, it is possible that Bede knew Gregory I's words on art and the illiterate. However humble these beginning may be, they do suggest a certain international culture in the early Middle Ages.

Popes Gregory II and III coped with the opening stages of Byzantium's struggle over religious art. The sources are not very forthcoming about their position on art itself. Both popes, apparently, believed that images were an old and constant tradition of the church and, as such, beyond reproach. An argument from tradition, without usually specifying any particular aspect of that tradition, was a constant weapon in the Western, especially in the papal, arsenal. To learn what Gregory III believed about images one must turn to the records of the Roman synod of 769 which are themselves revealed only in extracts contained in correspondence of Pope Hadrian I from the 780s and 790s. Evidently, Gregory defended images because they were useful to memory

and evoked compunction. Furthermore, God himself had made images and commanded images to be made. And images transported the mind from the visible to the invisible. Finally, Gregory III defended the referential argument and the argument that the unlettered could learn from images what the lettered learned from books.¹⁰⁹ Once again, one sees that there was a fairly wide circulation of ideas available for selection and application.

Pope Hadrian I expressed himself on images in his letter to Irene and Constantine (the *Hadrianum*) and in his response to the *Capitulare adversus synodum* (the *Responsum*). In each document, and especially in the latter, Hadrian cited so many patristic sources that we begin to get a sense of the precise way in which ideas about images were circulating in the West. Hadrian accepted the referential argument. He believed that images could teach the unlettered. He thought images could provoke compunction and salutary emotions. He accepted that images could move one from the visible to the invisible and, accordingly, he accepted that images of Christ could be made because they revealed his humanity. Hadrian thought that the material of which images were made was irrelevant. In some respects Hadrian advanced the argument. He was particularly keen on the traditional aspect of images. Attacking them was wrong because they had so long been an essential part of church life. In addition, more so than any of his predecessors – as far as we know – he insisted that images were licit because papal authority said so.¹¹⁰ This argument would gain strength in the decades ahead.

Theodulf was the primary author of the *Opus Caroli Regis*.¹¹¹ He was a thoroughgoing Augustinian. He shared the Church Father's principled indifference to art in specifically religious contexts. He was no Philistine; he had a sophisticated aesthetic sense and appreciated art for its own sake. He simply did not believe that one image that was more beautiful than another or was somehow holier. Theodulf articulated what might be called the Carolingian *via media* on religious art. It was permissible to have such art but impermissible to destroy it. One might possess art for decoration and for commemoration. By the former term Theodulf meant simply that Christians might decorate places of worship as tokens of respect and to enhance worship. By the latter term he meant that images might remind people of stories they had heard or read. He did not believe that images could teach. One infers this from the fact that in citing Gregory's correspondence with Serenus of Marseilles Theodulf quotes the bit about not destroying art but neglects to quote the bit about art teaching the

109 Ibid., 118–23, esp. 120–21.

110 Ibid., 150–56.

111 Ibid., 180–204, 220–24.

illiterate. In Theodulf's mind art had commemorative value only in so far as a prospective viewer had been taught before he viewed a work of art. For the rest, Theodulf was skeptical of all the traditional arguments on behalf of sacred art. He rejected the referential argument – calling it “flatly absurd.” He did not say that God's command that some images to be made authorized the making of images now. He did not believe that visible things might lead the viewer's mind up to invisible things, although I do wonder if his argument about decoration and enhanced worship might lean in that direction. He said that we need to learn to use our “internal eyes,” our “mind's eye.” He did not explicitly accept or reject the incarnational argument. He said, rather, that no images could reveal the Son of God. God is to be sought in the heart, not in pictures. There is a certain irony in Theodulf's positions which are, presumably, the positions of the Carolingian court. Just when he was articulating a rather austere view of religious art the Carolingian world was beginning to produce such art in great quantity and of high quality.

Indeed, it is fascinating to recall that in the beautiful little chapel of Germigny-des Prés that Theodulf constructed he placed, in the apse above the altar, a beautiful – and extant – mosaic of the Ark of the Covenant with its attendant cherubim. Here is one of those images commanded by God himself, as it were.¹¹² Now, Theodulf produced renditions of the scriptures that were aniconic and at the court of Charlemagne there were books such as the Dagulf Psalter that lacked images. So was there an iconophobic – not to say iconoclastic – posture at Charlemagne's court? Hardly. Beginning with the Godesclac Evangelistery in about 783 and continuing through an astonishing series of Gospel books the “court school” – about which, now, one must be very careful – produced one gloriously beautiful and illuminated book after another. There books were the products of a court just, as it were, spreading its wings, gaining confidence, and assuming its place among contemporary powers.¹¹³ The *Opus Caroli Regis* was a potent anti-Byzantine polemic. The art of Charlemagne's court was something entirely different.

Pope Paschal I reiterated some traditional positions and added a wrinkle or two of his own.¹¹⁴ He equated images with sacramental signs like the water in baptism. To my knowledge no one else made precisely this argument. He

112 Ann Freeman and Paul Meyvaert, “The Meaning of Theodulf's Apse Mosaic at Germigny-des-Prés,” *Gesta* 40 (2001), 125–39.

113 For a summary with further literature see *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 226–30. For a broader perspective see Lawrence Nees, *Early Medieval Art* (Oxford: 2002), 173–94.

114 *Images, Iconoclasm, and the Carolingians*, 257–60.

dealt at some length with a point Hadrian and Theodulf had made more or less in passing: Images are not idols. He went on at some length explaining that the Exodus prohibition was only for the Jews who were then under the law. Accordingly, he defended images because God himself had commanded that some images be made. Finally, he accepted the argument from incarnation.

The Paris *Libellus* is more systematic than either Hadrian's *Responsum* or Theodulf's *Opus Caroli Regis*.¹¹⁵ The reason is quite simple: Hadrian was responding to the *Capitulare adversus synodum* and Theodulf was responding to the *acta* of 11 Nicaea. Each writer went *seriatim* through the materials before him instead of writing a coherent treatise on images. For that matter, Jonas and Dungal replied to what Claudius of Turin had written. The Paris bishops seem to have had before them the *Hadrianum* and the *Responsum*, the *acta* of 11 Nicaea, as well as Michael 11's letter to Louis the Pious. There is no evidence that they had the *Opus Caroli Regis*. The *Libellus* is organized around four basic themes: Images are acceptable; forms of worship; images cannot be equated with the Holy Cross; why images are permissible. The *Libellus* echoes the long tradition that held that it was wrong either to worship or to destroy images. Paris did not echo Theodulf's idea that images were acceptable for decoration and commemoration. Otherwise, the *Libellus* legitimates images because God commanded some images to be made. The argument from incarnation was affirmed as was the argument that images can teach and also the referential argument. After all its lengthy reflections, one semi-Augustinian statement made at Paris is striking: The bishops said it would have made no difference if there had never been an image.

Some of what the Paris bishops read in Michael's letter launched them into gape-jawed amazement.¹¹⁶ Michael described to Louis some practices to which he took exception. The Paris bishops judged him to be an iconoclast and they by no means therefore approved the practices he criticized. Michael said that iconodules burned lamps and incense before images, wrapped them in fine linen, made them sponsors at baptism, scraped paint off them and mixed the scraping with the wine of the Eucharist, handed communion to the faithful on images, and used images as portable altars for private masses. Absolutely none of these practices can be identified in any Western source.

The discussion of worship in the *Libellus* is longer and subtler than any in the whole iconoclast period except that of John of Damascus and constitutes original thinking because no one in the West knew John. The *Libellus*

115 Ibid., 268–79.

116 Ibid., 260–63.

is primarily informed by Augustine on worship and there is no evidence that John knew him. The basic point is that a kind of adoration is owed to God that is not to be paid to anyone or anything else. For the Paris fathers the cross stands in a unique position and may be paid a kind of reverence not paid to images. The traditional view that everyone understood the difference between *latreia* and *proskynesis*, or between *adoratio* and *veneratio* is simply wrong. The underlying concept was well understood but Greek and Latin authors used these words almost interchangeably. The point is that there was a kind of reverence owed to God that was unique. Popes Gregory II and III, Paul I, and Hadrian affirmed that images might be venerated, as did the Paris fathers but not Theodulf. Nevertheless, no author in the West was prepared to attribute ontological holiness to images or to accept the existence of miraculous images or of *acheiropoieta* – images “not made by human hands.”

So, over about a century and a half Western writers produced hundreds and hundreds of pages dealing with images. In every case, writers were prompted to put quill to parchment. No one ever set out to address the subject of images in a comprehensive, systematic way. In contradistinction to older scholarly views, it is clear that Western writers understood the fundamental issues very clearly and that they wrote with confidence and discernment.

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